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MERICAN AUTHORS

PROF. DAVID J. HILL

WM. CULLEN BRYANT

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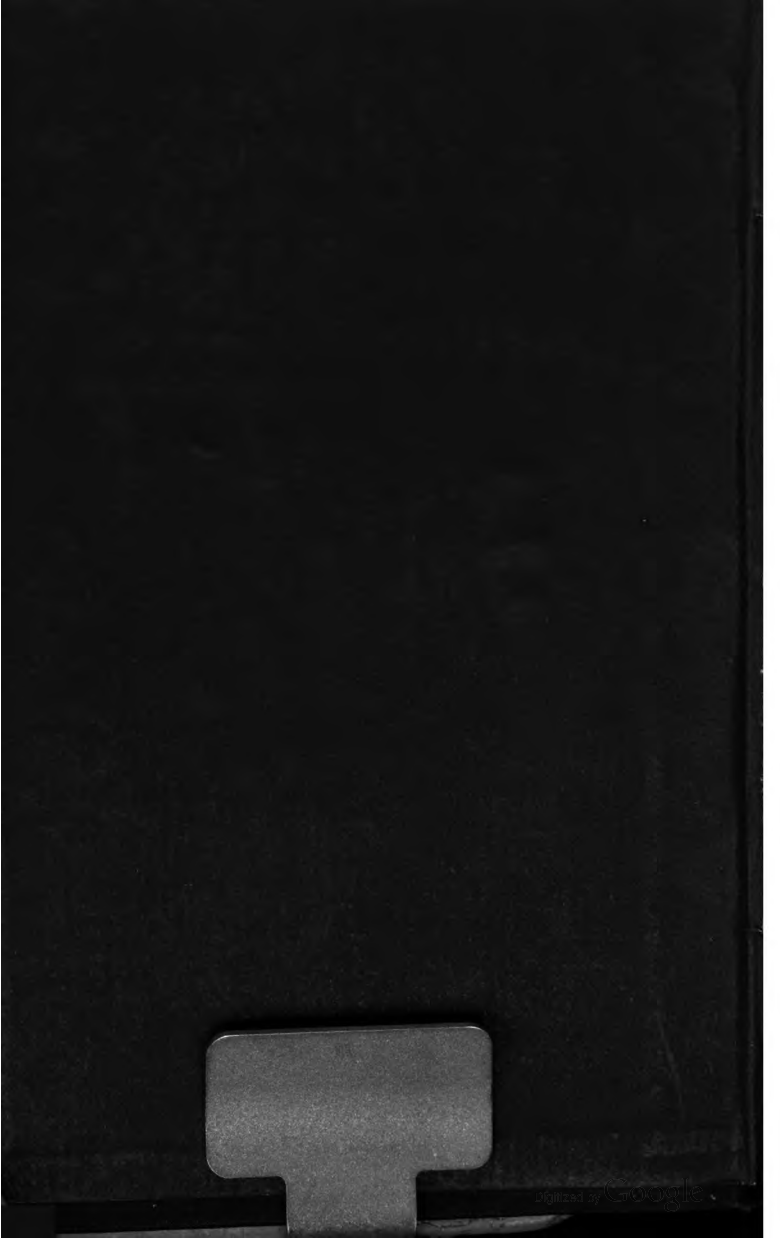
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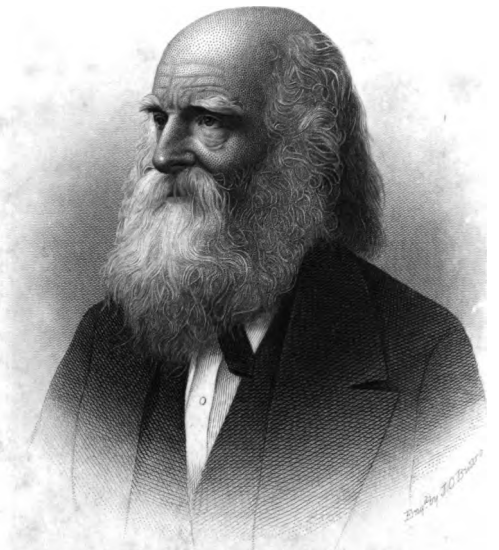

William Cullen Bryant

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WILLIAM [illegible] BRYANT.

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NEW YORK:
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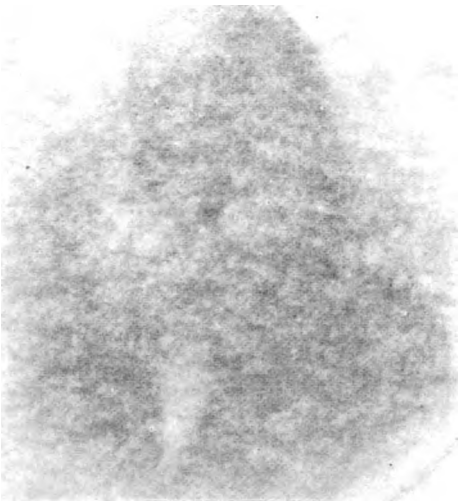

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AMERICAN AUTHORS.

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

BY

DAVID J. HILL,

PROFESSOR IN THE UNIVERSITY AT LEWISBURG; AUTHOR OF "ELEMENTS OF RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION," AND "SCIENCE OF RHETORIC."

With Portrait on Steel.

NEW YORK:
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PREFACE.

ALTHOUGH this little volume contains the leading facts of Mr. Bryant's life, it does not pretend to be a complete biography, such as his family will doubtless cause to be written by some one to whom his private papers will be intrusted for that purpose. Such an extended work, if it appears, will present him as his friends wish him to be known and thought of by his fellow-men. This sketch is based upon an independent, and, it is hoped, an impartial judgment, of the man and the writer as his life and works display him to the world. If the picture contains more of light than of shade, it is because fact has fixed the proportion, and fidelity to truth requires a faithful reproduction.

I am under obligation to several friends for important information concerning the details of the poet's life, and to his publishers — Messrs. D. Appleton & Co., G. P. Putnam's Sons, and Houghton & Osgood — for permission to make extracts from his works. These are, for the most part, of an autobiographical character; but some have been made to illustrate his prose style. Mr. Isaac Henderson, the publisher of "The New-York

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Evening Post," has also granted permission to make use of the articles published in that journal and in the memorial pamphlet reprinted from it.

The political and journalistic career of Mr. Bryant has received less attention than the literary phase of his life, as being less important to the purpose of the series to which this volume belongs. The general design of the sketch will also explain the omission of some particulars which some readers may wish had been admitted to these pages.

DAVID J. HILL.

UNIVERSITY AT LEWISBURG,
February, 1879.

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THE CHRONOLOGY OF BRYANT'S LIFE.

	DATE.
William Cullen Bryant born	Nov. 3, 1794
First Poems printed	March 18, 1807
"The Embargo" printed	1808
"The Genius of Columbia"	1810
Enters Williams College	Oct., 1810
Leaves Williams College	May, 1811
"Thanatopsis" written	1812
Begins the Study of Law	1812
Admitted to the Bar	1815
"Thanatopsis" printed	1817
Marries Miss Fanny Fairchild	1821
Delivers "The Ages" at Harvard	1821
Removes to New-York City	1825
Union of "The New-York Review" and "The New-York Literary Gazette"	March 17, 1826
Becomes Assistant Editor of "The Evening Post"	1826
Edits "The Talisman" with Verplanck and Sands	1827–1830
Becomes Chief Editor of "The Evening Post"	1829
First European Tour	1834–1835
"The Fountain, and Other Poems," published	1842
First Tour in the South	March–May, 1843
"The White-Footed Deer, and Other Poems," published	1844
Purchases the Estate at Roslyn	1845
Second European Tour	April–Dec., 1845
Delivers the Oration on Thomas Cole	1848
Second Tour in the South, and First Visit to Cuba	March–May, 1849

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	DATE.
Third European Tour	June–Oct., 1849
"Letters of a Traveller" published	1850
Presides at the Banquet to Kossuth	Dec. 9, 1851
Delivers the Oration on J. Fenimore Cooper	Feb. 25, 1852
Fourth European Tour, Visit to the Holy Land, and Second Visit to Cuba	1852
A Complete Edition of Poems published	1854
Fifth European Tour, and First Visit to Spain	1857–1858
Baptized at Naples	April, 1858
Dangerous Illness of Mrs. Bryant at Naples	May, 1858
"Letters from Spain and Other Countries" published	1859
Address at the Schiller Festival	Nov. 11, 1859
Delivers the Oration on Washington Irving	1860
Made Presidential Elector	1860
"Thirty Poems" published	1863
Seventieth Birthday celebrated by the Century Club	Nov. 3, 1864
Death of Mrs. Bryant	June, 1866
Last European Tour	1867
The Free-Trade Banquet to Bryant	Jan. 30, 1868
"Letters from the East" published	1869
Delivers the Oration on Fitz-Greene Halleck	Feb. 3, 1869
Translation of "The Iliad" published	1870
Delivers the Oration on Gulian C. Verplanck	May 17, 1870
Translation of "The Odyssey" published	1871
Address on Italian Unity	Jan., 1871
Address on the Unveiling of the Morse Statue	June 10, 1871
Tour in Mexico	Winter of 1871–72
Address on the Unveiling of the Shakespeare Statue	May 22, 1872
Address on Reform	Sept. 23, 1872
Address on the Scott Statue	Nov. 4, 1872
Visited by the Commemorative Committee	Nov. 3, 1874
"The Flood of Years" published	1876
Presentation of the Commemorative Vase	June 20, 1876
Delivers the Oration on Mazzini	May 29, 1878
Death of Bryant	June 12, 1878
Burial	June 14, 1878

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CHRONOLOGY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE.

	BORN.	DIED.
JONATHAN EDWARDS	1703	1758
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN	1706	1790
FRANCIS HOPKINSON	1738	1791
JOHN TRUMBULL	1750	1831
TIMOTHY DWIGHT	1752	1817
PHILIP FRENEAU	1752	1832
JOEL BARLOW	1755	1812
CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN	1771	1810
JAMES KIRKE PAULDING	1779	1860
WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING	1780	1842
WASHINGTON IRVING	1783	1859
RICHARD HENRY DANA	1787	1879
JAMES FENIMORE COOPER	1789	1851
FITZ-GREENE HALLECK	1790	1867
WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT	1794	1878
JOSEPH RODMAN DRAKE	1795	1820
WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT	1796	1859
GEORGE BANCROFT	1800	——
RALPH WALDO EMERSON	1803	——
NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE	1804	1864
HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW	1807	——
JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER	1808	——
EDGAR ALLAN POE	1809	1849
OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES	1809	——
JOHN LOTHROP MOTLEY	1814	1877
JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL	1819	——
BAYARD TAYLOR	1825	1878

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LIFE OF WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

CHAPTER I.

CHILDHOOD.

1794-1807.

"A delicate child and slender,
With lock of light-brown hair,
From knoll to knoll is leaping
In the breezy summer air."

FROM many points of view the life of William Cullen Bryant is impressive. For nearly a century, as from a secure eminence, he saw "the flood of years" poured from the exhaustless urn of time by the mighty hand, and watched the eddying movements of men and nations as they swept on in their courses, or sank forever beneath the tide. He followed in the journals of the day the campaigns of the first Napoleon, and beheld his final fall at Waterloo. He watched the entire career of Louis Philippe and of Louis Napoleon; and at last saw the French Republic re-established,

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and its first president pass away. At home he witnessed the struggles that attended the settlement of the Constitution, and mingled his opinions with those of Jefferson, Clay, Calhoun, and Webster. He lived to see the civil conflict ended, the Union restored, and freedom made universal in the Republic. In literature he saw the author of "Waverley" take his place among the world's masters in fiction. He was past the meridian of life when Macaulay wrote his "History of England;" and Dickens and Thackeray were mere striplings when his fame as a poet was established. Longfellow and Emerson — gray-headed men when he died — were his children in song; and one has publicly recognized him as his earliest teacher in the art of verse.

But it is not a veneration for antiquity alone that interests his countrymen in the life of the poet. His career is a lesson to the world in the philosophy of living. With little of the "storm and stress" that often make men conspicuous, and throw a halo of heroic glamour about them, his quiet life has a peculiar power over the mind. It illustrates the possible harmony of genius, virtue, and prosperity, — a harmony so often doubted. If his life does not contain much of thrilling incident or brilliant achievement, it exemplifies the possible attainment of the great ends of living without these accompaniments. To men of earlier and

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more barbarous times the life of our poet would seem tame and commonplace. To the best minds of our milder age it presents an almost ideal existence, — affording quiet without inaction, society without the sacrifice of retirement, variety without vicissitude, fame without vituperation, and wealth without dishonor.

William Cullen Bryant was born on the 3d of November, 1794, at Cummington, Mass. He sprang from that vigorous and God-fearing Anglo-American race that has subdued the rugged soil of New England, and furnished the leaders of our intellectual life in larger proportion than any other. The first Bryant is said to have crossed the ocean in "The Mayflower;" but the tradition is not authenticated by documentary proof. One Stephen Bryant is known to have settled at Plymouth, Mass., before 1640, where he married, and was afterward a town-officer. This was probably the "Mayflower" colonist, and the first American ancestor of the poet.

The great-grandson of Stephen Bryant inherited from his father the name of Peter and the profession of medicine. Having established himself in practice at North Bridgewater, he fell in love with Miss Sarah Snell, a descendant of John Alden, the handsome secretary of Miles Standish. Before Dr. Peter Bryant had won his bride, her father removed to Cummington. Nothing daunted,

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the young physician resolved to follow, and soon transferred himself and his medicines to the new home of the lady's father. In 1792 the pair were married, and made their home under the same roof with the bride's parents. Here were born to them seven children, of whom William Cullen was the second.

Dr. Bryant was more than an ordinary village physician. He seems to have been somewhat carefully educated; for he knew what was best in the poetry of two literatures, the English and the French. He was not a writer for the press, but was fond of exercising his talent for rhyming by throwing his thoughts into verse, and succeeded in producing some very respectable Hudibrastic lines. He was a keen student of human nature, and had a ready appreciation of a fine stroke of wit, or a lurking gleam of humor. He delighted in the epigrammatic lines of the poets of Queen Anne's time, and had made his excellent memory a well-stored magazine of satiric verses. He added to his intellectual accomplishments those muscular feats which are so much admired in rural communities; and doubtless was supposed to make better pills, and have more control over a fever, because he could swing a barrel of cider from the ground over the wheel of a wagon. His personal appearance assisted in winning for him the respect of his village neighbors. His tall, broad-shouldered,

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well-dressed figure impressed the beholder with the idea that he was a person of some consequence. Such, at least, his fellow-citizens thought him; for they sent him several times to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, and afterwards to the State Senate. His public life brought him much in contact with professional and literary men in Boston, where he was honored by those who knew him.

The poet's mother was a lady of personal dignity and excellent good sense. Her education was probably limited to the branches taught in a common school; but she possessed those qualities of heart and that pious devotion that make home happy and life beautiful. The poet alludes to this "stately lady" in his autobiographic poem, "A Lifetime," written when the scenes of childhood were recollections of a remote past. He pictures himself standing by the knee of his mother, and

"Reading of ancient peoples
And realms beyond the sea;

Of the cruel king of Egypt
Who made God's people slaves,
And perished with all his army,
Drowned in the Red-sea waves;

Of Deborah, who mustered
Her brethren long oppressed,
And routed the heathen army,
And gave her people rest;

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And the sadder, gentler story,—
How Christ, the crucified,
With a prayer for those who slew him,
Forgave them as he died."

The career of young Bryant seemed to have been fixed for him in the selection of his name. His father loved his profession and his boy, and thought to honor both by devoting his son to medicine. Four years before the poet's birth, a great medical authority at Edinburgh had died. Dr. Bryant had read and admired his able lectures on the healing art, and had learned to venerate the amiable qualities of his personal character. He found a ready and satisfactory solution of that most vexatious problem of parentage, the naming of a boy, by calling his son after the Edinburgh professor, William Cullen. American boys seem to have an instinctive aversion to caste, even in its traditional perpetuation of a profession; and William Cullen Bryant seems never to have intended becoming a disciple of Æsculapius. His brothers entertained the same feeling, and Dr. Peter Bryant's mortars and pestles found no lineal heir.

There was little promise of a long life in the frail child, but even reason to fear that it was needless to select a profession for him. His body was small, and seemed to lack vitality; while his head, and especially the cerebral regions, showed

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an abnormally rapid development. The parents became alarmed; but the good doctor adopted a course of treatment, which, at least, has the merit of having proved effectual. Not far from the house was a deep spring of cold water, and into this the protesting infant was immersed at an early hour every morning by Dr. Bryant's students. The philosophy of this hydropathic treatment probably is, that all the vitality of the child was aroused in his struggles to prevent the process!

The Bryant homestead, owned at the day of his death by the poet, is situated in the grand hill-country of Western Massachusetts. The summits of the hills are still covered with dark, waving forests, and gray rocks gleam out here and there from their shadowed sides. Along the slopes well-tilled farm-lands stretch away to the rushing streams that have cut down deep into the narrow valleys between the hills.

> "Thou wilt find nothing here
> Of all that pained thee in the haunts of men,
> And made thee loathe thy life."

From these hills and woods and streams the poet drank in that deep, pure love of Nature that breathes through his noblest lines. Here springs beneath the brown trailing skirts of Autumn "The Fringed Gentian," —

> "Blossom bright with autumn dew,
> And colored with the heaven's own blue,

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That openest when the quiet light
Succeeds the keen and frosty night."

Here too,

"When beechen buds begin to swell,
And woods the bluebird's warble know
The yellow violet's modest bell
Peeps from the last year's leaves below."

Here, not many rods from the homestead, flows "The Rivulet," whose "warbling waters often drew" his "little feet, when life was new," —

"This little rill, that from the springs
Of yonder grove its current brings,
Plays on the slope a while, and then
Goes prattling into groves again."

Beyond a meadow to the south of the old house is the "Entrance to a Wood," over which the poet's eye read the inscription, —

"Stranger, if thou hast learned a truth which needs
No school of long experience, — that the world
Is full of guilt and misery, — and hast seen
Enough of all its sorrows, crimes, and cares
To tire thee of it, enter this wild wood,
And view the haunts of Nature."

To these healing scenes of childhood the poet throughout his life made frequent pilgrimages. Wearied with the strifes of men, and worn with the distractions of a toilsome profession, a return to these haunts of innocence was like turning back

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the hand on the dial-plate of life. Nature, like a fond mother, ever seemed to wait his coming, and to give him new heart for the struggles of the world. His joy is almost rapturous as he sings, —

"I stand upon my native hills again,
Broad, round, and green, that in the summer sky,
With garniture of waving grass and grain,
Orchards, and beechen forests, basking lie;
While deep the sunless fens are scooped between,
Where brawl o'er shallow beds the streams unseen."

There seem to have been domestic reasons for the child's love of outdoor life and the consolations of Nature's freedom. His mother's father, Ebenezer Snell, retained many of the sterner Puritan qualities, and was a rigid disciplinarian. He inherited a magisterial severity from his good ancestors who burned witches, and whipped culprits; and had developed whatever of the latent Draconian spirit there was in him by a term of service as an officer of the peace. The whipping-post was still a social institution in Massachusetts, and its use was not discontinued until some years after the poet's birth. The grandfather carried his notions of government into the household, and was a terror to the entire family. Bryant has given an interesting picture of the position of children generally in the days of his childhood, and has drawn his illustrations from his own

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home. It will be best appreciated in his own language: —

"The boys of the generation to which I belonged — that is to say, who were born in the last years of the last century or the earliest of this — were brought up under a system of discipline which put a far greater distance between parents and their children than now exists. The parents seemed to think this necessary in order to secure obedience. They were believers in the old maxim, that familiarity breeds contempt. My own parents lived in the house with my grandfather and grandmother on the mother's side. My grandfather was a disciplinarian of the stricter sort; and I can hardly find words to express the awe in which I stood of him, — an awe so great as almost to prevent any thing like affection on my part, although he was in the main kind, and certainly never thought of being severe beyond what was necessary to maintain a proper degree of order in the family.

"The other boys in that part of the country, my schoolmates and playfellows, were educated on the same system. Yet there were at that time some indications that this very severe discipline was beginning to relax. With my father and mother I was on much easier terms than with my grandfather. If a favor was to be asked of my grandfather, it was asked with fear and trembling: the request was postponed to the last moment, and then made with hesitation and blushes and a confused utterance.

"One of the means of keeping the boys of that generation in order was a little bundle of birchen rods, bound together by a small cord, and generally suspended on a nail against the wall in the kitchen. This was esteemed as much a part of the necessary furniture as the crane that hung in the kitchen fireplace, or the shovel and tongs. It

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sometimes happened that the boy suffered a fate similar to that of the eagle in the fable, wounded by an arrow fledged with a feather from his own wing; in other words, the boy was made to gather the twigs intended for his own castigation."[1]

This system seems to have been productive of one juvenile virtue which the later relaxation of discipline has allowed to languish, — a veneration for the aged. A modest deference to superiors was inculcated, and, if necessary, enforced. The minister of the parish was the most important personage in the community, however; and all were expected to show marked consideration for "the cloth." Long pastorates tended to enchain the regard of the old through the memory of past kindnesses, and the respect of the young through a reverence for the hand that had christened and blessed them. The minister was a self-appointed superintendent of schools, who attended the examinations, heard recitations in the catechism, and exhorted the pupils to uprightness and godliness of life. The poet has described one of these pastoral visits to the school which he attended. Having heard the lessons recited, and having examined the children in the "Westminster Catechism," the worthy man began his address. "He told us," says the poet, "how much greater were the advantages of education which we enjoyed

[1] The Boys of my Boyhood: St. Nicholas, December, 1876.

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than those which had fallen to the lot of our parents; and exhorted us to make the best possible use of them, both for our own sakes and that of our parents, who were ready to make any sacrifice for us, even so far as to take the bread out of their own mouths to give us. I remember being disgusted with this illustration of parental kindness, which I was obliged to listen to twice at least every year."

The educational advantages enjoyed by the young auditors seem not to have been extraordinary. A New-England country school of that day included in its curriculum little more than reading, writing, and arithmetic; though some attention was given to spelling and grammar. The quality of the instruction was not of a character to warrant much congratulation of the pupils.

Thus surrounded with the asperities of discipline, and disgusted with exhortations, it is not wonderful that the green fields, the bickering brooks, and the solemn woods, possessed a peculiar charm for the delicate boy. The most delightful hours of his childhood were spent in ramblings and musings "under the open sky," listening to "Nature's teachings," holding "communion with her visible forms," and interpreting her "various language." To him this was not then poetry, but existence. Only long afterward, when the mind sought consciously for its highest sources of hap-

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piness, and, missing them, strove to regain them, did these early impressions embody themselves in rhythmical expression, — the verbal concrete of these first emotions. The poet found the key to Nature's chamber of harmonies in these experiences of childhood, and whoever would find the key of his literary life must seek it here.

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CHAPTER II.

THE BOY-POET.

1807-1815.

"I see him next in his chamber,
Where he sits him down to write
The rhymes he framed in his ramble,
And he cons them with delight."

DR. PETER BRYANT was an ambitious father, and wished to make of his boy a distinguished man. He watched with a father's solicitude the physical development of the child, but not less closely the tendencies of his mind. He discovered in him with pleasure a capacity for the enjoyment and the making of verses. His own favorite poems were put into the boy's hands, and he was encouraged to study and imitate them. The impression made upon his mind by the wits of Queen Anne's time is easily perceived in his earliest productions. Pope's methods are especially traceable in all the juvenile poems of his young admirer, and his correctness and balanced style often characterize even those later descrip-

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tions of Nature which lack the artificial air of this early master.

How soon young Bryant began to write verses there is no means of knowing. He is said to have made a metrical paraphrase of the first chapter of the Book of Job when in his tenth year. His first literary labors were more profitable than those of most young writers; for his paraphrase brought him ninepence from his rigid but well-meaning grandfather. This performance was followed by numerous efforts; among them an ode on an eclipse of the sun, and an elegy on the death of a cousin.

Although this precocity is unusual, it is by no means unparalleled. Poe wrote "Al Aaraaf" when he was ten years old, and, after his fame as a poet was established, beguiled a Boston audience into believing that it was an extraordinary performance, until he cruelly informed some friends, before he left the city, that it was a vagary in verse composed in his childhood. Pope wrote smooth verses at twelve, and Cowley at ten. Though Chatterton died a mere boy, his verses deceived some of the crowned heads of literature. Tasso began writing at nine; and a book of poems has recently been printed, composed entirely by two little children.

Bryant himself, in later years, did not regard this early gift of versification as at all remarkable

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or promising. Speaking of Fitz-Greene Halleck, he says, "I do not find that Halleck began to write verses prematurely. Poetry, with most men, is one of the sins of their youth, and a great deal of it is written before the authors can be justly said to have reached years of discretion. With the greater number it runs its course, and passes off, like the measles or the chicken-pox; with a few it takes the chronic form, and lasts a lifetime; and I have known cases of persons attacked by it in old age. A very small number who begin, like Milton, Cowley, and Pope, to write verses when scarce out of childhood, afterwards become eminent as poets; but, as a rule, precocity in this department of letters is no sign of genius." [1]

Dr. Bryant differed in opinion from his son so far as to think him a prodigy, and strove to guide him in acquiring the art of poetry. The poet afterwards acknowledged his indebtedness to parental instruction and encouragement in these lines of his impressive "Hymn to Death:" —

> "For he is in his grave who taught my youth
> The art of verse, and in the bud of life
> Offered me to the Muses."

Some of his early verses were printed in "The Hampshire Gazette," and were much admired in the neighborhood. Among the earliest of these

[1] Orations and Addresses, pp. 161, 162.

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was a poem read before the school which Master Bryant attended when he was twelve years old. It appeared in the "Gazette" in March, 1807, and was signed "C. B." As these juvenile compositions are not printed in the current editions of the author's poems, some illustrative extracts may be appropriate here. After referring to the "backward look of affrighted Science" when

> "The dire strife with Britain's pow'r unfurled
> War's bloody banners over half the world,"

the young bard paints the happier days when "smiling Science lifts her eye sedate;" and closes with this address to his fellow-pupils, in which the lessons of Pope and his Puritan mother are united in an interesting manner: —

> "My comrades! tho' we're not a num'rous train,
> 'Tis doubtful whether we shall meet again;
> For Death's cold hand may aim th' unerring blow,
> And lay with heavy stroke the victim low:
> From this frail state th' unbody'd soul will fly,
> And sink to hell, or soar above the sky.
> Then let us tread, as lowly Jesus trod,
> The path that leads the sinner to his God;
> Keep heaven's bright mansion ever in our eyes;
> Press tow'rds the mark, and seize the glorious prize."

One might suppose that the first objects celebrated in the verses of the young poet would be the beauties of Nature which everywhere surrounded him, and filled his soul with delight.

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Such, however, was not the case. Poetry aims at the ideal, the distant, the mysterious, the unknown, the unattainable. Hardly a line of these early poems seems to have been inspired by the scenes around its author. Poems of the affections are usually written before the attainment of the loved object, or after its loss: possession and enjoyment crowd out the desire to commemorate in verse. It is often so in the poet's treatment of Nature.

The first clear strains of Bryant's song were patriotic, and the loudest notes were martial. Like every young American who thinks at all, he became interested in politics at a very early age. We often regard our own times as unhappily discordant, and more partisan than patriotic in their strifes, and long for a return of the days of fraternal harmony among our countrymen. The period of Bryant's youth, however, was not less marked by party-spirit than our own; and a wider historical view would probably show that men have always been very much alike as regards difference of opinion in matters of state.

In December, 1807, President Jefferson recommended that an embargo be laid upon all vessels owned by citizens of the United States, to prevent their leaving American ports. The people of New England saw in this measure the destruction of their commerce, and some even imagined that it favored a design of Napoleon to reduce this coun-

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try to subjection. Young Bryant caught the spirit of the hour, and his imagination kindled into a blaze. The result was a poem printed in a thin pamphlet of twelve pages, and bearing the following title: —

THE EMBARGO;

OR, SKETCHES OF THE TIMES.

A SATIRE.

BY A YOUTH OF THIRTEEN.

The fiery indignation of the poet flashes out at every line, but fairly flames in the following stanzas: —

"Satiric Muse, shall injured Commerce weep
Her ravish'd rights, and will thy thunders sleep?
Dart thy keen glances, knit thy threat'ning brows;
Call fire from heaven to blast thy country's foes!
Oh! let a youth thine inspiration learn;
Oh! give him 'thoughts that breathe, and words that burn'!

Curse of our nation, source of countless woes,
From whose dark womb unreckon'd misery flows,
Th' Embargo rages like a sweeping wind:
Fear lowers before, and Famine stalks behind."

The impending danger of the nation is frantically pointed out in the following climax of terrors: —

"How foul a blot Columbia's glory stains!
How dark the scene! — infatuation reigns!

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For French intrigue, which wheedles to devour,
Threatens to fix us in Napoleon's power;
Anon within th' insatiate vortex whirl'd,
Whose wide periphery involves the world."

The Chief Magistrate does not escape a scathing at the hands of the New-England school-boy, who addresses him in this vigorous apostrophe: —

"And thou, the scorn of every patriot name,
Thy country's ruin and her council's shame!
Poor servile thing! derision of the brave!
Who erst from Tarleton fled to Carter's cave;
Thou who, when menac'd by perfidious Gaul,
Didst prostrate to her whisker'd minion fall;
And, when our cash her empty bags supply'd,
Didst meanly strive the foul disgrace to hide, —
Go, wretch! resign the presidential chair;
Disclose thy secret measures, foul or fair;
Go search with curious eye for horned frogs
Mid the wild wastes of Louisianian bogs,
Or, where Ohio rolls his turbid stream,
Dig for huge bones, thy glory and thy theme;
Go, scan, Philosophist, thy . . . charms,
And sink supinely in her sable arms;
But quit to abler hands the helm of state,
Nor image ruin on thy country's fate."

In February, 1809, the embargo was removed; but President Jefferson was not so accommodating as to "resign the presidential chair," and the Republic soon recovered from its fright at the encroachments of Napoleon's power. The satire, however, had evinced the presence of a new poet,

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whose rhetoric was felt and admired even by those who did not entertain his sentiments. "The Monthly Anthology," a Boston literary journal owned by a club of gentlemen of culture, questioned the statement that the poem was written by a boy of thirteen. The second edition of "The Embargo," therefore, contained an advertisement, which vindicated the author's claims in the following language: —

"A doubt having been intimated in 'The Monthly Anthology' of June last, whether a youth of thirteen years could have been the author of this poem, in justice to his merits the friends of the writer feel obliged to certify the fact from their personal knowledge of himself and his family, as well as his literary improvement and extraordinary talents. They would premise that they do not come uncalled before the public to bear this testimony. They would prefer that he should be judged by his works, without favor or affection. As the doubt has been suggested, they deem it merely an act of justice to remove it; after which they leave him a candidate for favor in common with other literary adventurers. They therefore assure the public, that Mr. Bryant, the author, is a native of Cummington, in the county of Hampshire, and in the month of November last arrived at the age of fourteen years. These facts can be authenticated by many of the inhabitants of that place, as well as by several of his friends who give this notice; and, if it be deemed worthy of further inquiry, the printer is enabled to disclose their names, and places of residence.

"FEBRUARY, 1809."

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This second edition afforded another proof of the writer's ability by adding a few of his earlier compositions, including "The Spanish Revolution," "The Reward of Literary Merit," "The Contented Ploughman," and a translation from the odes of Horace.

About the time "The Embargo" was first published, Bryant began the study of Latin under the instruction of the Rev. Dr. Thomas Snell of Brookfield. At that time there were few classical schools in New England, and a preparation for college was usually secured by taking private lessons; the clergy being the classical teachers in most of the rural districts. A year later, Greek was added to his studies, under the tuition of the Rev. Moses Hallock of Plainfield. He was so fond of this noble language, that, after two months' study, he had read the entire Greek Testament.

During these years he was much interested in botany, of which his father was particularly fond. Together they rambled over the fields in pursuit of rare flowers, analyzing and preserving them with scientific enthusiasm.

A fondness for reading grew with his years, and was wisely directed by his father. A list of the books for boys in the poet's youth has been given by him in an article already referred to, and, together with his comments, is worth inserting here: —

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"For the boys of the present day an immense number of books have been provided, some of them excellent, some mere trash or worse; but scarce any are now read which are not of recent date. The question is often asked, What books had they to read seventy or eighty years since? They had books, and some of great merit. There was 'Sandford and Merton,' and 'Little Jack;' there was 'Robinson Crusoe,' with its variations, 'The Swiss Family Robinson,' and 'The New Robinson Crusoe;' there was a Mrs. Trimmer's 'Knowledge of Nature,' and Berquin's lively narratives and sketches translated from the French; there was 'Philip Quarll,' and Watts's 'Poems for Children,' and Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress,'' and Mrs. Barbauld's writings, and the 'Miscellaneous Poems' of Cowper. Later we had Miss Edgeworth's 'Parent's Assistant' and 'Evenings at Home.' All these, if not numerous, were at least often read; and the frequent reading of a few good books is thought to be at least as improving, as useful in storing the mind, and teaching one to think, as the mere cursory reading of many."

The life of the young poet was by no means wholly devoted to learning and literature. The old-time enjoyments of New England country life were mingled with his serious occupations. On the long winter evenings the schoolhouse was filled with the lads and lasses of the neighborhood for matches in spelling, or lessons in singing. "Huskings" and "apple-parings" had not gone out of fashion; and on these festive occasions jokes were cracked, stories told, and tricks performed, as the cider cheered the robust boys and

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buxom maidens. But the poet found his chief enjoyment in solitary rambles, or in such occupations as left his mind free for quiet musing. "The streams," he says, "which bickered through the narrow glens of the region in which I lived, were much better stocked with trout in those days than now; for the country had been newly opened to settlement. The boys all were anglers. I confess to having felt a strong interest in that 'sport,' as I no longer call it. I have long since been weaned from the propensity of which I speak; but I have no doubt that the instinct which inclines so many to it, and some of them our grave divines, is a remnant of the original wild nature of man."[1]

When Bryant had reached his sixteenth year, he was found to possess enough knowledge of Latin and Greek to admit him to the sophomore class in college. Accordingly, in the autumn of 1810, he was sent to Williams College, at Williamstown, Mass. At this institution he seems to have manifested little that attracted attention, or foreshadowed a distinguished career. He was known by his professors and classmates as a ready and industrious student, especially fond of the classic languages and the best literature. He has himself recorded one incident that illustrates his sensibility to the humorous. Irving's "Salmagundi"

[1] St. Nicholas, December, 1876.

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appeared while he was in college; and, having committed a portion of it to repeat as a declamation before his class, he was so overcome with laughter when he appeared on the floor, that he was unable to proceed, and drew upon himself the rebuke of the tutor.

Though exceedingly modest in the display of his poetical gift while in college, he once recited an original poem before his class, and was commended for it. He also read a humorous satire on the college before a society of which he was a member, — a performance at which he afterwards often smiled. The composition was never printed, and exists, it is said, only in the memory of the Rev. Dr. Hallock, a son of Bryant's private instructor in Greek. This gentleman, a friend of the poet and of the college, has kept it, and perhaps will continue to keep it, in this secure repository.

At the end of his second term, May, 1811, Bryant determined to enter the junior class at Yale College at the beginning of the fall session, and withdrew from Williams with an honorable dismissal. The venerable Dr. Calvin Durfee of Williamstown, who has kindly furnished most of the facts above stated, adds that Bryant "was always scholarly and gentlemanly, with no eccentricities — no shooting forth of intellectual powers in one direction, to the neglect of other important qualifications or attainments"

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At the opening of the next session he was prepared to join the junior class at Yale; but the altered fortunes of his father prevented his carrying out his plan. He remained at home for some time, pursuing those classical and mathematical studies which he had hoped to take under the instruction of professors.

His name has always been an honored one at Williamstown. In 1819 the honorary degree of A.M. was conferred on him by the college; and some years later he was restored to his place in his class, and enrolled as an alumnus. His death is noticed in the obituary records of the college as a graduate belonging to the class of 1813.

During these years of study his pen was not idle. Among the verses composed during this period are "The Genius of Columbia," and several Fourth-of-July odes. In all these we find the patriotic and the martial spirit most conspicuous, with no attempt to sing the praises of Nature. "The Genius of Columbia" would do honor to an older bard than the sophomore of sixteen who wrote it. Seated on her "throne of adamant" in "the regions of the West," the Genius of Columbia speaks thus to Napoleon in the presence of the nations: —

"Go, favored son of Glory, go!
Thy dark aspiring aims pursue!
The blast of domination blow
Earth's wide-extended regions through!

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Though Austria, twice subjected, own
The thunders of thy conquering hand,
And Tyranny erect her throne
In hapless Sweden's fallen land;

Yet know, a nation lives whose soul
Regards thee with disdainful eye,
Undaunted scorns thy proud control,
And dares thy swarming hordes defy.

Unshaken as their native rocks,
Its hardy sons heroic rise,
Prepared to meet thy fiercest shocks,
Protected by the favoring skies.

Their fertile plains and woody hills
Are fanned by Freedom's purest gales,
And her celestial presence fills
The deepening glens and spacious vales."

In 1812 appeared an "Ode for the Fourth of July," inspired by the prospect of a struggle with Great Britain, in which the poet laments the haste to "let slip the dogs of war," but declares, —

"Should Justice call to battle,
The applauding shout we'd raise;
A million swords would leave their sheaths,
A million bayonets blaze.
The stern resolve, the courage high,
The mind untamed by ill,
The fires that warmed our leader's breast,
His followers' bosoms fill.
Our fathers bore the shock of war:
Their sons can bear it still.

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The same ennobling spirit
That kindles valor's flame,
That nerves us to a war of right,
Forbids a war of shame.
For not in Conquest's impious train
Shall Freedom's children stand;
Nor shall in guilty fray be raised
The high-souled warrior's hand;
Nor shall the patriot draw his sword
At Gallia's proud command."

As the palpitating verse touches the name of "Gallia," the hatred for Napoleon stirs the poet's soul almost to frenzy, and prompts this heated adjuration: —

"No! by our fathers' ashes,
And by their sacred cause,
The Gaul shall never call us slaves,
Shall never give us laws:
Even let him from a swarming fleet
Debark his veteran host,
A living wall of patriot hearts
Shall fence the frowning coast:
A bolder race than generous Spain,
A better cause, we boast."

About this time we find the first expression of that intimacy with nature which characterizes nearly all of Bryant's later poetry. While still a youth in college or at home, he composed the first sketch of the one poem by which he is best known, and doubtless always will be, — "Than-

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atopsis." One account represents the scenes of Williamstown as the source of his inspiration. "Local tradition," says a writer in the Bryant memorial pamphlet, "represents him as actually composing the poem while seated on a rock in a lovely ravine known as Flora's Glen, on the outskirts of Williamstown. There is reason to suspect that much of this story is apocryphal, and the fact that the rock is still pointed out to visitors by way of proof weighs but little in the balance of belief."[1] "The Bryant Homestead Book," probably our best authority in the matter, tells a different story. "It was here at Cummington," runs the record, "while wandering in the primeval forests, over the floor of which were scattered the gigantic trunks of fallen trees, mouldering for long years, and suggesting an indefinitely remote antiquity, and where silent rivulets crept along through the carpet of dead leaves, the spoil of thousands of summers, that the poem entitled 'Thanatopsis' was composed. The young poet had read the poems of Kirke White, which, edited by Southey, were published about that time, and a small volume of Southey's poems; and some lines of those authors had kindled his imagination, which, going forth over the face of the inhabitants of the globe, sought to bring under one broad and comprehensive view the destinies of the human

[1] Bryant Memorial Pamphlet, p. 20.

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race in the present life, and the perpetual rising and passing away of generation after generation who are nourished by the fruits of the soil, and find a resting-place in its bosom."

The first draught of the poem lay among the poet's papers for nearly five years before it was brought to light. At length, one day, after the author had left home, his father discovered the poem, and said to a lady who was fond of poetry that he had found some of William's verses. The lady read them, and, as she looked up from the paper, burst into tears, moved by the sad pathos of mortality as pictured in the lad's solemn lines.

At that time "The North-American Review," then in its infancy, published poetry as well as prose, and was considered the literary magazine of the day. It was owned and managed by a society of young men of talent, who called their organization "The North-American Club." Richard Henry Dana and Edward Tyrrel Channing were then acting as editors. The poem was sent to Dana, who was surprised at the genius displayed in it, and seriously questioned its being the composition of an American. Before accepting it for publication, he resolved to inquire into its authorship. The note which accompanied the poem was brief and indefinite. Having heard that there was a State senator named Bryant, he concluded that this gentleman must be the author. Determined to

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see him, he proceeded to the State House, where the Senate was then in session, and inquired for Senator Bryant. He was shown a tall, dark, broad-shouldered man in middle life, whose appearance had so little of the poetical, that the editor thought it useless to speak to him of the matter. The poem was published, however, in the "Review" for September, 1817. Some years afterward, when Bryant went to Cambridge to deliver his poem "The Ages," Dana mentioned his father's "Thanatopsis," and the real author explained the case.

Perhaps there is not in the history of literature a better illustration of the slow evolution of a poem. As published in the "Review," the blank verse is introduced by the following stanzas, which may be quoted here, as they are omitted from later editions of the poem: —

"Not that from life and all its woes
The hand of death shall set me free;
Not that this head shall then repose
In the low vale most peacefully.

Ah! when I touch Time's farthest brink,
A kinder solace must attend:
It chills my very soul to think
On that dread hour when life must end.

In vain the flattering verse may breathe
Of ease from pain, and rest from strife:
There is a sacred dread of death
Inwoven with the strings of life.

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This bitter cup at first was given
When angry *Justice* frowned severe;
And 'tis the eternal doom of Heaven,
That man must view the grave with fear."

The remainder of the poem consists of forty-nine lines, instead of eighty-one as in the final version. The beautiful conclusion beginning, "So live, that when thy summons comes," was added later. Hardly a sentence remains unaltered. Crude forms of expression have been elaborated. Puerile conceptions have been expunged. Noble images have been introduced. The flow of the verses has been rendered more musical. Instead of

"Take the wings
Of morning, and the Borean desert pierce;
Or lose thyself in the continuous woods
That veil Oregan, where he hears no sound
Save his own dashings," —

we now have, —

"Take the wings
Of morning; pierce the Barcan wilderness;
Or lose thyself in the continuous woods
Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound
Save his own dashings." —

Instead of

"Thousands more
Will share thy destiny. The tittering world
Dance to the grave. The busy brood of care
Plod on, and each one chases as before
His favorite phantom," —

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we now read, —

> "All that breathe
> Will share thy destiny. The gay will laugh
> When thou art gone, the solemn brood of care
> Plod on, and each one as before will chase
> His favorite phantom."

Though art has heightened the coloring, and smoothed the metre, the immortal part of the poem belongs to its earliest as well as to its latest form. It is safe to say that nothing equal to it had previously been written on this side of the Atlantic. It was not only the beginning of a new era in art for the poet's fatherland, but part of a new development in the poetry of the world. Years afterward, when the boy-poet had become a silver-haired veteran in song, he was reminded of the fact in the following eloquent language: —

"When you came into the world, the storm-spirits were abroad in letters, and were rising in number and power, in spite of the re-action against the reign of terror. Byron was a child of six years, and Shelley an infant of two; and Coleridge and Wordsworth, young men of twenty-four, were still in the unrest and frenzy of radicalism, and had neither found each other nor the faith and love that so exalted them and the new literature which they founded. The masters of German literature, Goethe and Schiller, were friends and fellow-workers, but little known to the great world, and with hardly a public to appreciate them in the Germany that had been so much under the thought as well as the power of Frederick the Great. Your life belongs

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to the great record, and you rank with the spirits of light and reconciliation that led on the Renaissance from the night of bigotry and scepticism. You belong to the goodly company who with Wordsworth and his fellows opened to men the life of Nature and the truth of God." [1]

[1] Dr. Samuel Osgood's address at the presentation of the Bryant Vase.

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CHAPTER III.

TEN YEARS AT THE BAR.

1815-1825.

"And next, in a hall of justice,
Scarce grown to manly years,
'Mid the hoary-headed wranglers
The slender youth appears."

IN order to state connectedly the history of "Thanatopsis," we have passed over some facts in the poet's life to which we must now recur.

In 1812, after spending some time at home in the diligent pursuit of knowledge without other than parental direction, Bryant began the study of law. He pursued his legal studies for nearly two years in the office of Judge Samuel Howe of Worthington, but finished them with the Hon. William Baylies of Bridgewater. In 1815, at the age of twenty-one, he was admitted to the bar at Plymouth, Mass.

He began the practice of his profession at Plainfield, not far from Cummington. It was during

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his residence in this place that he wrote the lines "To a Waterfowl," — the best known of his earlier poems after "Thanatopsis." "Like the other productions of its author," says a friend of Bryant's, "its conception was natural. One evening he saw a wild-duck flying across a sky of marvellous beauty, and a picture of the Divine Providence was revealed to him. Southey's poem 'Ebb-Tide' suggested the form of the stanza; and his genius wrought the elevated and tranquillizing verses, which were published in 'The North-American Review.'" [1]

In 1817, having found Plainfield too small an arena for his ambition, he removed to Great Barrington, a picturesque village situated among the noble hills of Berkshire, in the beautiful valley of the Housatonic. The young lawyer is still remembered by a few of the older inhabitants as an honorable, industrious recluse, fond of books and nature, but mingling little with his fellow-townsmen. He would take long rambles in the fields and groves, and return laden with botanical trophies, which he preserved with the same interest as when with boyish enthusiasm he accompanied his father on similar excursions. Though he was a constant reader of the best general literature, these pursuits were not allowed to interfere with his professional engagements; and he was regarded as a good lawyer.

[1] Dr. H. N. Powers, in Scribner's Monthly, August, 1878.

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The charming verses on "Green River," written at this time, reveal the subjective side of these hours of communion with Nature. Says the poet,—

> "When breezes are soft, and skies are fair,
> I steal an hour from study and care,
> And hie me away to the woodland scene,
> Where wanders the stream with waters green."

In lines not very flattering to the court litigants, from whose business he won his bread, he refers to the happy freedom of his childhood:—

> "Though forced to drudge for the dregs of men,
> And scrawl strange words with the barbarous pen,
> And mingle among the jostling crowd,
> Where the sons of strife are subtle and loud,
> I often come to this quiet place
> To breathe the airs that ruffle thy face,
> And gaze upon thee in silent dream;
> For in thy lonely and lovely stream
> An image of that calm life appears
> That won my heart in my greener years."

During his residence at Great Barrington, notwithstanding his reference to "the dregs of men," Bryant was made a justice of the peace by the citizens. Among the earliest acts of the young justice was the performing of a marriage-ceremony under somewhat peculiar circumstances. A prominent citizen had found a bride, who, like himself, was a member of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and believed that the marriage-contract could not

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be properly sealed by a minister of any other denomination. As no clergyman of their church could be found in their neighborhood, they preferred a civil ceremony to the services of a dissenter. Accordingly, the young squire was requested to tie the conjugal knot.

We have a picture of the poet at this time from the pen of Miss Catherine M. Sedgwick, a lady who afterwards became distinguished in literature as a pure and graceful writer, and for the refinement and home-sentiment of her sketches and stories. Writing from Stockbridge, Mass., in 1820, she says, —

"I sent for Mr. Bryant last week, and he called to see me on his return from court. I told him Mr. Sewall had commissioned me to request some contributions from him to a collection of hymns; and he said, without any hesitation, that he was obliged to Mr. Sewall, and would with great pleasure comply with his request. He has a charming countenance, and modest but not bashful manners. I made him promise to come and see us shortly. He seemed gratified; and, if Mr. Sewall has reason to be obliged to me (which I certainly think he has), I am doubly obliged by an opportunity of securing the acquaintance of so interesting a man."[1]

While at Great Barrington, Bryant met and loved Miss Fanny Fairchild, a lady of good family, and the possessor of many womanly graces. The poet's nature is well illustrated in his love-making.

[1] Quoted in the Bryant Memorial Pamphlet, p. 19.

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Here, as in his poetry, the Platonic element is predominant. Doubtless no love was ever purer than his, or more lasting; but it seems to have been wanting in fervor of expression. Several of his poems were prompted by the lady of his choice; but there is nothing in any one of them that indicates that passionate fondness which is common in this kind of poetry. The "Song" in which the hunter, lingering beside the hill, sees the dwelling of his Genevieve, is a shy commemoration of the poet's own love. Mr. Richard H. Stoddard justly calls it "chilly:" for though "oft he turns his truant eye, and pauses oft, and lingers near," the hunter finally bounds away through the forest in pursuit of his game; which, as an ardent lover, he ought not to do.

This shyness in expressing his feelings is shown in the poet's announcement of the wedding, when the happy pair had set the day for their union. The law required that the banns be thrice read in church on successive Sundays before a wedding could take place. Being himself, at the time, the town-clerk, he was placed in the embarrassing position of having to proclaim his own nuptials. For this trying ordeal his modest nature could not muster the necessary courage; and accordingly, instead of reading the banns before the congregation, he wrote out the notice, and posted it on the church-door. The wedding took place in 1821.

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Though diffident in the expression of his love, it was not misplaced. For more than forty years the happy pair journeyed on together, mutually helpful and trustful. The poet has embalmed the memory of his wife's purity, devotion, and piety, in "The Future Life" and "The Life that Is;" and finally lamented her loss in the touching revery dated October, 1866.

It was in this same year (1821) that Bryant was invited to deliver a poem before the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard College at the commencement anniversary. His previous fame had not rested upon "Thanatopsis" and the lines "To a Waterfowl" alone; for during his residence at Great Barrington he had contributed a number of poems to "The United-States Gazette," a weekly magazine then published in Boston. During Mr. Dana's editorship of "The North-American Review," Bryant had furnished several prose articles to the pages of that periodical. In July, 1818, a paper on "American Poetry" had appeared, in which he pointed out the poverty of our infant literature in the department of verse. In June, 1819, he had contributed an essay on "The Happy Temperament," in which frivolity was shown not to be the source of true happiness, and deeper springs of pleasure were indicated. In September of the same year he had made a critical examination of trisyllabic feet in iambic verse, proving his acquaintance with the technics of versification.

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The young lawyer appeared at Cambridge, in response to the invitation, with "The Ages," one of the longest and most elaborate poems that he ever wrote; "the best poem of the kind," says Mr. Richard H. Stoddard, "that was ever recited before a college society, either in this country or in England, — grave, stately, thoughtful, presenting, in animated, picturesque stanzas, a compact summary of the history of mankind." It has the honor of standing first in the complete editions of the poet's works, as the fittest prelude to all the poems of his life.

Soon after the delivery of "The Ages" at Harvard, and doubtless on the strength of the success of that performance, the author published at Cambridge a small volume of his poems. In a notice of this collection in "The North-American Review," the critic begins by inquiring after the poet's master: "Of what school is this writer? — the Lake, the Pope, or the Cockney, or some other? Does he imitate Byron or Scott, or Campbell? These are the standing interrogatories in all tribunals having the jurisdiction of poetry, and it behooves us to see that they are administered. He is, then, of the school of Nature, and of Cowper, if we may answer for him; of the school which aims to express fine thoughts in true and obvious English, without attempting or fearing to write like any one in particular, and

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without being distinguished for using or avoiding any set of words or phrases." "There is running through the whole of this little collection," continues the writer, "a strain of pure and high sentiment, that expands and lifts up the soul, and brings it nearer to the source of moral beauty. This is not indefinitely and obscurely shadowed out, but it animates bright images and clear thoughts. There is everywhere a simple and delicate portraiture of the subtle and ever-vanishing beauties of Nature, which she seems willing to conceal as her choicest things, and which none but minds the most susceptible can seize, and no other than a writer of great genius can body forth in words. There is in this poetry something more than mere painting. It does not merely offer in rich colors what the eye may see or the heart feel, or what may fill the imagination with a religious grandeur. It does not merely rise to sublime heights of thought, with the forms and allusions that obey none but master-spirits. Besides these, there are wrought into the composition a humorous philosophy and deep reflection that make the subjects as sensible to the understanding as they are splendid to the imagination." [1]

The war for the deliverance of Greece, which began in the previous year (1820), aroused a Hellenic spirit in the poet, and occasioned the writing

[1] North-American Review, October, 1821, pp. 380, 381.

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of "The Massacre at Scio," and "The Song of the Greek Amazon;" neither of which, however, is equal to the spirited Hellenic verses of Fitz-Greene Halleck. Local traditions probably suggested the Indian poems which were written in the four years following, including "The Indian Girl's Lament," "An Indian Story," "An Indian at the Burial-place of his Fathers," and "Monument Mountain." The last-named noble poem, the poet himself tells us, had its origin in a local tradition. The mountain referred to in the poem is a bold precipice in Great Barrington, below which spreads the valley of the Housatonic. On the brow of the precipice there was a conical pile of small stones, erected, it was said, by the Indians, in memory of a most tragic event. The story which this monument commemorates was related to a friend of the poet's by an Indian woman of the tribe that formerly occupied the mountain. She affirmed that an Indian girl had fallen in love with her cousin, whom the laws of her tribe forbade her to marry. After suffering some time from melancholy, she decked herself gayly as for a festival, and, in company with a female friend, proceeded to the height. Having passed the day in singing the songs of her tribe, at sunset she hurled herself from the rock, and perished in the fall.

Though other themes engaged his mind, the

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charms of Nature continued to touch the sweetest chords in the poet's lyre. "The Rivulet," "March," "Summer Wind," "After a Tempest," "Autumn Woods," "To a Cloud," the "Song of the Stars," and, noblest symphony of all, "A Forest Hymn," give evidence of his daily worship in "God's ancient sanctuaries."

The delivery of "The Ages," and the publication of his collected poems, attracted considerable attention to Bryant in all the literary circles of the country. Among other commendatory notices of his poetry was one from the pen of Gulian C. Verplanck, a leading Knickerbocker of New York, and a person of great influence in social and literary circles. Mr. Verplanck was a frequent visitor at the house of Mr. Henry D. Sedgwick, a substantial man of scholarly tastes, who had gathered about him such literary friends as Cooper, Halleck, Percival, and others distinguished in their day. Mr. Sedgwick made his summer home at Stockbridge, Mass., not far from Great Barrington, and was a friend and admirer of Bryant's. The feelings of this coterie are revealed in a letter from Miss Catherine M. Sedgwick, written from New York in 1822:—

"We have a great deal of pleasure [says this lady] from a glimpse of Bryant. I never saw him so happy, nor half so agreeable. I think he is very much animated with his prospects. Heaven grant that they may be more than real-

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ized! I sometimes feel some misgivings about it; but I think it is impossible, that, in the increasing demand for native literature, a man of his resources, who has justly the *first* reputation, should not be able to command a competency. He has good sense, too, good judgment, and moderation. . . . He seems so modest, that every one seems eager to prove to him the merit of which he appears unconscious. I wish you had seen him last evening. Mrs. Nicholas was here, and half a dozen gentlemen. She was ambitious to recite before Bryant. She was very becomingly dressed for the grand ball to which she was going; and, wrought up to her highest pitch of excitement, she recited her favorite pieces better than I ever heard her, and concluded the whole, without request or any note of preparation, by 'The Waterfowl' and 'Thanatopsis.' Bryant's face 'brightened all over,'—was one gleam of light; and, I am certain, at the moment he felt the ecstasy of a poet."[1]

The "prospects" here referred to were the abandonment of law, and the adoption of literature as a profession. They were not realized at once; but the group of friends in New York were determined to do all in their power to bring the poet to that city. In 1825 their end was accomplished. Mr. Sedgwick and Mr. Verplanck procured a position for Bryant as associate with Henry J. Anderson in the editorship of "The New-York Review and Athenæum Magazine," then about to be started. Wearied with the routine labors of the law, the poet laid aside his law-books, and removed to the metropolis, to embark on the uncertain waters of a literary life.

[1] Quoted in the Bryant Memorial Pamphlet, p. 20.

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CHAPTER IV.

LITERARY LIFE IN NEW YORK.

1825-1834.

"And there, 'mid the clash of presses,
He plies the rapid pen
In the battles of opinion
That divide the sons of men."

NEW YORK in 1825 was not a literary city, though it was the residence of some men of letters who occupied a conspicuous place in the earlier literature of our country. The young Massachusetts lawyer found himself in congenial society, and at once made many friends among the literati of the day.

Prominent in the circle to which Bryant was introduced as a welcome addition was Gulian C. Verplanck, — a true Knickerbocker by descent and in his veneration for the old Dutch fathers. He was a scholar, a lawyer, a politician, a professor, a reformer, a philanthropist, a critic, and an antiquary. At the time when Bryant first met him he had been a member of the New-York

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Assembly, and had written a treatise on "The Evidences of Christianity." He was afterward a member of Congress, and a prominent actor in national politics. As a Greek scholar he had few equals in this country. His published works include an "Essay on the Doctrine of Contracts," and an edition of Shakespeare. The most striking fact in this strangely miscellaneous career is that he was insignificant in nothing. Learning, character, and industry combined to make him prominent in all he undertook. He is a distinguished example of what the persistency of the Dutch character, when united with the insight of the English mind, can accomplish in the practical affairs of the world. He was Bryant's senior by eight years.

Fitz-Greene Halleck is known to every schoolboy as the author of "Marco Bozzaris," and by the present generation of readers is remembered for little else besides that spirited poem. To have composed one such, however, is a clear title to immortality. Like Gray, whose "Elegy" is the most popular poem in the English language, he struck a chord that will never cease to vibrate. Born in Guilford, Conn., four years earlier than Bryant, he came to New York in 1813, and, when Bryant first met him, was the favorite of the day in literary circles. His "Fanny," published in 1821, the same year with Bryant's poem, "The Ages," placed him first among his countrymen in the

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ranks of graceful satirists. For thirty-five years (1828–1863) he wrote nothing; and, when at length he resumed the pen, his productions showed no growth. From a poet of unusual promise, he lapsed into a mere conversationist; but so brilliant were his discourses, that they compensated in great measure for the silence of his Muse. Few besides Coleridge have displayed such fascinating powers of conversation. "If there had been any friend to take note of what he said," writes Bryant, "a volume of his pithy and pleasant sayings might have been compiled, as entertaining as any thing of the kind which has appeared since Boswell's Johnson." His method of composition was peculiar. His poems grew as he walked in the fields, or mused in his chair, without a scrap of paper before him. He conned them over again and again, pruning and adding till they were as perfect as he could make them; and his wonderful memory registered every improvement with an infallible accuracy. The result of this long elaboration was imprinted upon his mind as distinctly as if first memorized in its final form. As he recited these verses in his walks, his movements revealed the powerful emotions that possessed him, and his very fingers twitched with a nervous sympathy. When he entered the private service of the millionnaire John Jacob Astor, as a confidential clerk and accountant, his duties prevented

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his composing in his favorite manner, and he abandoned the Muse altogether. As a man he was lively and satirical, fond of argument, and a defender of unpopular causes. Cheney, the artist, was so pestered by his oddities, that he said to the poet after a few sittings for a portrait, "I have finished your likeness."—"You have been expeditious," said Halleck. "Yes," replied Cheney: "I put it in the fire this morning."

During the winters, James A. Hillhouse, the dramatist, resided in the city, and was a frequent guest in Mr. Sedgwick's drawing-room. He had been called by the father of T. B. Macaulay the most accomplished young man with whom that gentleman was acquainted. The publication of the drama of "Hadad," in the year when Bryant first met Hillhouse, had placed him first among the playwrights of the day. His position among his literary associates may be inferred from these lines by Halleck:—

> "Hillhouse, whose music, like his themes,
> Lifts earth to heaven; whose poet-dreams
> Are pure and holy as the hymn
> Echoed from harps of seraphim
> By bards that drank at Zion's fountains
> When glory, peace, and hope were hers,
> And beautiful upon her mountains
> The feet of angel messengers."

James Fenimore Cooper, the novelist, and

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James Gates Percival, the poet and geologist, were often in the city, and both were associates of Bryant. These and others hardly less distinguished had founded a weekly club, of which Bryant has given us a sketch in his memorial address on Cooper: —

"Of the members who have since passed away were Chancellor Kent, the jurist; Wiley, the intelligent and liberal bookseller; Henry D. Sedgwick, always active in schemes of benevolence; Jarvis, the painter, a man of infinite humor, whose jests awoke inextinguishable laughter; De Kay, the naturalist; Sands, the poet; Jacob Harvey, whose genial memory is cherished by many friends. Of those who are yet living [1852] was Morse, the inventor of the electric telegraph; Durand, then one of the first of engravers, and now no less illustrious as a painter; Henry James Anderson, whose acquirements might awaken the envy of the ripest scholars of the Old World; Halleck, the poet and wit; Verplanck, who has given the world the best edition of Shakespeare for general readers; Dr. King, now at the head of Columbia College, and his two immediate predecessors in that office. I might enlarge the list with many other names of no less distinction. The army and navy contributed their proportion of members, whose names are on record in our national history. . . . The club met in the hotel called Washington Hall, the site of which is now occupied by part of the circuit of Stewart's marble building."[1]

Such was the society in which the poet found himself on his arrival in New York; certainly a

[1] Orations and Addresses, p. 60.

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more congenial environment than the court-scenes where he had toiled for "the dregs of men."

That much was expected of the new review which Bryant was to assist in editing is evident from the following greeting by William Coleman in the editorial columns of "The Evening Post," soon after Bryant's appearance in the city: —

"NEW-YORK REVIEW AND ATHENÆUM MAGAZINE. — Yesterday a person called on me to solicit a subscription to a periodical work under this title; and, on looking at the prospectus, I perceived it was to be a continuation of 'The Atlantic Magazine,' to be conducted by Henry James Anderson and William Cullen Bryant, under this new name. I therefore did not hesitate a moment to enroll myself among the number of those who engaged to patronize this undertaking. We have, from its early appearance, taken a more than common interest in the success of 'The Atlantic Magazine,' which early gave promise of becoming a useful, able, and even elegant vehicle for the improvement of literary taste, and the advancement of sound doctrines in the science of political economy, and of just and acute criticism; nor have our expectations been disappointed. We now anticipate still additional excellence from the well-known talents of the gentleman now associated with the former editor, and from 'the co-operation (which is alluded to in the prospectus) of several gentlemen amply qualified to furnish the departments of intelligence, poetry, and fiction.' With such encouragement, we cannot consent to compound for any thing short of a decided superiority in the various walks of letters. If it is what it ought to be, and what we expect it will be, to suppose it can want the most liberal and indeed splendid patronage would be a libel on the more refined of our citizens."

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The supposition that the new review might fail of "the most liberal and indeed splendid patronage" was well founded, whether the editorial inference be justified or not. Such talent as that of Bryant, Halleck, Dana, and Bancroft, may have been in demand by "the most refined of our citizens;" but it is no libel to say that these were exceedingly few. The day for periodical literature of any kind in this country had not dawned, and the choice few alone could not sustain a magazine such as Bryant and his associate offered to the public. Accordingly, on the 17th of March, 1826, "The New-York Review and Athenæum Magazine" was merged, with "The New-York Literary Gazette," in "The New-York Literary Gazette and American Athenæum;" which, after a separate existence of three months, was consolidated with "The United-States Literary Gazette;" and this, after a life of two months, was absorbed in "The United-States Review." Such were the vicissitudes of critical magazines in the infancy of our national literature. For years afterwards, genius and industry combined could hardly keep the editorial soul and body together in this field where fortunes are now annually made.

In 1825 Bryant had been temporarily employed on "The Evening Post;" and in 1826, after the discontinuance of "The New-York Review," he became permanently connected with that journal

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as assistant editor, though continuing to edit "The United-States Review" in conjunction with Charles Folsom of Cambridge. This last enterprise came to an end in a year after it was undertaken, and Bryant adopted journalism as the profession of his life.

"The Post" became a leading organ of the Democratic party, and in 1828 advocated Andrew Jackson for the presidency. It enjoyed a reputation for its literary character, as well as for eminence in politics, which made it a favorite with the aristocratic portion of the party of whose principles it was a champion. It was in the columns of "The Post" that the celebrated humorous odes known as the "Croaker Pieces" had appeared in 1819. They were written by Joseph Rodman Drake. "One afternoon about this time," says Hudson, "there was a group of young men standing in the vicinity of the Park in New York, just after a shower, admiring a magnificent rainbow. 'If I could have my wish,' said one, 'it would be to lie in the lap of that rainbow, and read Tom Campbell.' Immediately another of the group stepped forward, and exclaimed, 'You and I must be acquainted! my name is Drake.' — 'My name,' said the other, 'is Fitz-Greene Halleck.' Then and there Croaker took in a partner in the production of those popular satirical odes, and the firm became publicly known as 'Croaker & Co.'

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They created a great deal of amusement, and were much sought after, largely increasing the circulation of the paper."[1]

Though "The Post" had enriched its columns with original contributions to literature which any journal of to-day might be happy to secure, it was not, when Bryant began to write for it, a *news*-paper in the modern sense. Nothing can better impress us with the immense advances of society, and of journalism in particular, than a comparison of copies of the same journal for 1825 and 1878. In the earlier numbers we find news from Albany regarding the session of the Legislature, printed five days after the transactions recorded; extracts from English newspapers nearly a month old; despatches from different points in the United States dated a fortnight earlier than the paper; advertisements of cock-fights; and the time-tables of rapid stage-lines to Philadelphia, Boston, and the West. Bryant lived to see the invention of the electric telegraph, the wedding of the continents by submarine cables, and the organization of the Associated Press. His appreciation of this progress he more than once expressed in his own felicitous way. His speech at the dinner given to Samuel F. B. Morse in 1868 is a vivid presentation of some of these marvellous changes: —

[1] Hudson's History of Journalism, p. 220.

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"Charles Lamb, in one of his papers, remarks that a piece of news, which, when it left Botany Bay, was true to the letter, often becomes a lie before it reaches England. It is the advantage of the telegraph, that it gives you the news before circumstances have had time to alter it. The press is enabled to lay it fresh before the reader. It comes to him like a steak hot from the gridiron, instead of being cooled and made flavorless by a slow journey from a distant kitchen. A battle is fought three thousand miles away, and we have the news while they are taking the wounded to the hospital. A great orator rises in the British Parliament, and we read his words almost before the cheers of his friends have ceased. An earthquake shakes San Francisco, and we have the news before the people who have rushed into the street have returned to their houses. . . .

"In the Treatise on Bathos, Pope quotes, as a sample of absurdity not to be surpassed, a passage from some play, I think one of Nat Lee's, expressing the modest wish of a lover: —

'Ye gods, annihilate both space and time,
And make two lovers happy.'

"But see what changes a century brings forth! What was then an absurdity, what was arrant nonsense, is now the statement of a naked fact. Our guest has annihilated both space and time in the transmission of intelligence. The breadth of the Atlantic, with all its waves, is as nothing; and, in sending a message from Europe to this continent, the time, as computed by the clock, is some six hours less than nothing."[1]

For the first three years of his connection with "The Post" Bryant occupied a position second to

[1] Orations and Addresses, p. 327.

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William Coleman, who — like himself, a Massachusetts barrister — had founded the paper in 1801. Dr. J. W. Francis has given the following interesting sketch of Coleman's character as a man and as a journalist: —

"Coleman was a writer of grammatical excellence, though occasionally sadly at fault in force of diction. Under the influence of some perverse conceits, he would labor for months to establish some theoretical doctrine, or elucidate a useless proposition. He would underrate the best services to the Republic, if rendered by a political opponent. Chancellor Livingston found no quarters with him for his instrumentality in the Louisianian purchase. He would ride a hobby to death. It was hardly in the power of mortals even to alter his opinion when once formed. That yellow-fever was as contagious as small-pox, that skull-cap (the *scutellaria*) was a specific for hydrophobia, that Napoleon wanted the requisites of a military chieftain, were among the crotchets of his brain. The everlasting tractates which he put forth on these and other subjects would in the present day of editorial prowess scarcely be tolerated by a chronicle depending on public patronage."[1]

At this time "annuals" were in fashion, collections of poems and stories of a select order, prepared especially for gift-books. Such an annual, "The Talisman," appeared for three years (1827, 1829, 1830), edited by Bryant, Verplanck, and Robert C. Sands, under the pseudonyme of Francis Herbert, Esq. It was very successful, and

[1] Quoted in Hudson's History of Journalism, p. 221.

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was afterwards issued under the title of "Miscellanies."[1]

Sands, with whom Bryant was associated in several enterprises, was one of the most remarkable men in the history of our literature. It is a sad commentary on the fate of genius, that, fifty years after his death, his name was almost unknown to his countrymen. A journalist of fine ability, a humorist of marked originality, a poet of fruitful imagination, and withal a finished classical scholar, Sands has left no work which the world cares to preserve. In 1832 he contributed, with Bryant, James K. Paulding, William Leggett, and Catherine M. Sedgwick, to a miscellany in two volumes, called "Tales of the Glauber Spa."[2] At the age of thirty-three he was engaged in writing an imaginary account of Esquimaux literature, and had just penned the line, —

"Oh! think not my spirit among you abides," —

when he was suddenly attacked with apoplexy, and, dropping his pen at the end of the ominous line, fell on the threshold of his room, and expired

[1] Bryant's prose contributions to the Talisman were An Adventure in the East Indies, The Cascade of Melsingah, Recollections of the South of Spain, A Story of the Island of Cuba, The Indian Spring, The Whirlwind, Phanette des Gaulemes, and The Marriage Blunder.

[2] Bryant's contributions to the Tales of the Glauber Spa were Medfield and The Skeleton's Cave.

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in a few hours. His writings were collected and edited by Bryant and Verplanck.

In 1832 the poems of Bryant written previously to that date were collected in a volume, and published in New York. A copy was sent by Verplanck, and another by Bryant himself, to Washington Irving, — who was then secretary of the American legation in London, and looked upon, on both sides of the Atlantic, as an established writer, — with the hope that he might assist the poet in finding a publisher who could give him a favorable introduction to the British public. Before the day of publication in New York, Bryant addressed the following letter to Irving: —

NEW YORK, Dec. 29, 1831.

SIR, — I have put to press in this city a duodecimo volume of two hundred and forty pages, comprising all my poems which I thought worth printing, most of which have already appeared. Several of them, I believe, you have seen; and of some, if I am rightly informed, you have been pleased to express a favorable opinion. Before publishing the work here, I have sent a copy of it to Murray, the London bookseller, by whom I am desirous that it should be published in England. I have taken the liberty — which I hope you will pardon a countryman of yours, who relies on the known kindness of your disposition to plead his excuse — of referring him to you. As it is not altogether impossible that the work might be republished in England if I did not offer it myself, I could wish that it might be published by a respectable bookseller in a respectable manner.

I have written to Mr. Verplanck, desiring him to give

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me a letter to you on the subject; but, as the packet which takes out my book will sail before I can receive an answer, I have presumed so far on your goodness as to make the application myself. May I ask of you the favor to write to Mr. Murray on the subject as soon as you receive this? In my letter to him I have said nothing of the terms, which of course will depend upon circumstances which I may not know, or of which I cannot judge. I should be glad to receive something for the work; but, if he does not think it worth his while to give any thing, I had rather that he should take it for nothing than that it should not be published by a respectable bookseller.

I must again beg you to excuse the freedom I have taken. I have no personal acquaintance in England whom I could ask to do what I have ventured to request of you, and I know of no person to whom I could prefer the request with greater certainty that it will be kindly entertained.

I am, sir, with sentiments of the highest respect,

Your obedient humble servant,

WILLIAM C. BRYANT.

P.S. — I have taken the liberty to accompany this letter with a copy of the work.[1]

Irving, with his habitual kindness, undertook the commission for his countryman, whom at that time he had never met. He addressed a note to Mr. Murray, and received the following reply from his son: —

ALBEMARLE STREET, Jan. 30.

MY DEAR SIR, — Mr. Bryant's volume of poems has not yet made its appearance, though I believe it is on its way.

[1] This correspondence is taken from the Life and Letters of Washington Irving.

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Knowing as I do my father's antipathy to every thing in the shape of poetry of the present day, I doubt whether he will be disposed to publish it. If so, I will forward the volume to you when it comes to hand.

Very truly yours,

J. MURRAY.

Further conference with "the prince of publishers," who was at the time in embarrassed circumstances, made it evident that nothing could be done for Bryant in this quarter. Here Irving's commission properly ended; but his generosity led him a step farther, and involved him in trouble as a result. He carried the volume to Mr. Andrews, a fashionable bookseller, and induced him to reprint it, on the condition that he himself should write a dedication, and edit the poems. The compositors had proceeded as far as "The Song of Marion's Men," beginning, —

"Our band is few, but true and tried;
Our leader frank and bold:
The British soldier trembles
When Marion's name is told."

Andrews at once beheld in imagination an indignant public protesting against this slur on British courage, and saw his investment vanish into thin air as he read the luckless lines. He posted in hot haste to Irving's rooms, and pointed out the offensive passage. He demanded an

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alteration, a substitution either for the word "British," or "trembles." Irving saw no escape from compliance, and amended the third line so as to spoil the metre, and make it read, —

"And the foeman trembles in his camp."

For this act, prompted by generosity, he was afterwards severely attacked by one of Bryant's editorial associates, as related in the sketch of Irving's life in the series to which this book belongs.

Irving addressed the dedication to Samuel Rogers the poet, expressing a warm appreciation of Bryant's genius. In characterizing the poems, he says, "They transport us into the depths of the solemn primeval forest, to the shores of the lonely lake, the banks of the wild, nameless stream, or the brow of the rocky upland, rising like a promontory from amidst a wide ocean of foliage; while they shed around us the glory of a climate fierce in its extremes, but splendid in all its vicissitudes. His close observation of the phenomena of Nature, and the graphic felicity of his details, prevent his descriptions from ever becoming general and commonplace; while he has the gift of shedding over them a pensive grace that blends them all into harmony, and of clothing them with moral associations that make them speak to the heart. Neither, I am convinced, will it be the

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least of his merits in your eyes that his writings are imbued with the independent spirit and buoyant aspirations incident to a youthful, a free, and a rising country." [1]

Although his associate Leggett was bitter in his attack upon Irving, Bryant himself did not share the feeling of resentment toward his kind friend for the unwise alteration of the troublesome line. His gratitude was soon expressed in the following letter to Irving: —

NEW YORK, April 24, 1832.

MY DEAR SIR, — I have received a copy of the London edition of my poems forwarded by you. I find it difficult to express the sense I entertain of the obligation you have laid me under by doing so much more for me in this matter than I could have ventured, under any circumstances, to expect. Had your kindness been limited to procuring the publication of the work, I should still have esteemed the favor worthy of my particular acknowledgment; but by giving it the sanction of your name, and presenting it to the British public with a recommendation so powerful as yours on both sides of the Atlantic, I feel that you have done me an honor in the eyes of my countrymen and of the world.

It is said that you intend shortly to visit this country. Your return to your native land will be welcomed with enthusiasm, and I shall be most happy to make my acknowledgments in person.

I am, sir, very sincerely yours,

WM. C. BRYANT.

The poems were favorably received in Great

[1] Life and Letters, vol. ii. pp. 476, 477.

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Britain, where Bryant has since been regarded by high authorities as the sweetest of American singers, though not so widely read as several of his countrymen. John Wilson said in a review of the volume, "His poetry overflows with natural religion; with what Wordsworth calls 'the religion of the woods.' . . . It is indeed in the beautiful that the genius of Bryant finds its prime delight. He ensouls all dead, insensate things in that deep and delicate sense of their seeming life in which they breathe and smile before the eyes 'that love all they look upon;' and thus there is animation and enjoyment in the heart of the solitude."[1]

In America the volume was still more highly praised; and ever since, even during Bryant's long periods of silence, and to thousands who have read little of his verse, the tradition of his greatness has been a source of pride. "Others before him," said a critic of that day, "have sung the beauties of creation, and the greatness of God; but no one ever observed external things more closely, or transferred his impressions to paper in more vivid colors. A violet becomes, in his hands, a gem fit to be placed in an imperial diadem; a mountain leads his eyes to the canopy above it. On the whole, we may pronounce the book before us the best volume of American poetry that has yet appeared. The publication of such a volume

[1] Blackwood's Magazine, April, 1832, p. 646.

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is an important event in our literature. We have been too much in the habit of looking abroad for examples and models; and our poets, generally, have had the usual fortune of imitators, — their copies have fallen short of the originals." [1]

On the death of Coleman, in 1829, Bryant had become the editor-in-chief of "The Post," — a position which he retained to the day of his death, through a period of almost fifty years. He secured as his principal assistant William Leggett, an able but indiscreet writer, who had just failed in the conduct of a weekly paper called "The Critic;" that periodical having expired for want of support after six months of "life's fitful fever." Though Leggett had stipulated, when he became connected with "The Post," that he should not be asked to write political articles, in less than a year he became, under the instruction of his chief, an ardent Democrat, pointing his pen for free trade, and opposing with vehemence the United-States Bank.

Having schooled his disciple in the doctrines which he proposed to maintain, and feeling the need of relaxation, Bryant determined to visit Europe. Leaving the conduct of the paper to his assistant, he sailed for Havre with his family in the summer of 1834.

[1] W. J. Snelling in The North-American Review, April, 1832, p. 502.

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CHAPTER V.

A VISIT TO EUROPE.

1834-1836.

"I look, and the clashing presses,
And the town, are seen no more;
But there is the poet wandering
A strange and foreign shore."

THE first characteristic of Europe that impressed the American poet when he landed in France was the prevailing shadow of antiquity that rested upon every object that met his view. Customs, dwellings, churches, arches, towers, and battlements all seemed venerable heirlooms of a past unknown in his own country: and "the very hills about them," he declared, "looked scarcely as old; for there was youth in their vegetation, their shrubs and flowers." If the Old World bore the marks of age for the poet, her people presented a new phase of life to the hard-working editor, fresh from the toils and struggles of an American city, where existence was a sober and earnest pursuit of wealth and power. The gayety of the French

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people was a marvel to him. "The Parisian," he writes from Paris, "has his amusements as regularly as his meals, — the theatre, music, the dance, a walk in the Tuileries, a refection in the café, to which ladies resort as commonly as the other sex. Perpetual business, perpetual labor, is a thing of which he seems to have no idea. I wake in the middle of the night, and I hear the fiddle going, and the sound of feet keeping time, in some of the dependencies of the large building near the Tuileries, in which I have my lodgings."

It is the fresh, strong nationality of his feelings, united with his habits of close observation, that makes Bryant an interesting traveller. His letters written to "The Post," and ultimately published in a volume, were eagerly read by thousands as they appeared in the columns of that journal. He has, however, carefully avoided giving what would now be one of the most interesting features of his life, — an account of his interviews with various distinguished persons whose society he enjoyed, and opinions of their character. He alleges as a reason for the omission of personal details, his unwillingness to give offence by making public that which he had learned in private, — a somewhat remarkable modesty in a journalist, whose prosperity in modern times is so often dependent upon the services of Paul Pry.

No one who is in pursuit of thrilling incidents

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merely, or who seeks mainly for humorous adventures, will care to read Bryant's sketches of travel. They derive their chief value from their independent criticism of foreign institutions, their graphic description of natural scenery, the original reflections, interspersed with statements of fact, and the clear, transparent diction in which they are expressed. There is little of that glowing enthusiasm and picturesque delineation that are so conspicuous in the travels of Bayard Taylor, and nothing of the mock-sentimental hyperbolism that has made Mark Twain's books so popular. Bryant sees with the keen and accurate eye of an independent seeker of truth, but is neither an enthusiast nor a humorist.

After remaining some weeks in Paris, where he arrived in August, he set out for Florence. His description of his journey from the French capital to Chalons, on the Saône, may serve at once to illustrate his descriptive style, and some of his qualities as an observer: —

"Monotonous plains, covered with vineyards and wheat-fields, with very few trees, and those spoiled by being lopped for fuel; sunburnt women, driving carts, or at work in the fields; gloomy, cheerless-looking towns, with narrow, filthy streets; troops of beggars surrounding your carriage whenever you stop, or whenever the nature of the roads obliges the horses to walk, and chanting their requests in the most doleful whine imaginable, — such are the sights and sounds that meet you for the greater part of two hundred and fifty

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miles. There are, however, some exceptions as to the aspect of the country. Autun, one of the most ancient towns in France, and yet retaining some remains of Roman architecture, lies in a beautiful and picturesque region. A little beyond that town we ascended a hill by a road winding along a glen, the rocky sides of which were clothed with an unpruned wood; and a clear stream ran dashing over the stones, now on one side of the road, and then on the other, — the first instance of a brook left to follow its natural channel which I had seen in France. Two young Frenchmen, who were our fellow-passengers, were wild with delight at this glimpse of unspoiled nature. They followed the meanderings of the stream, leaping from rock to rock, and shouting till the woods rang again." [1]

The voyage down the Saône to Lyons is an instance of the inconveniences of European travel in those days. The passengers were crowded into a narrow, dirty cabin, with benches on the sides, and a long table in the middle, at which some noisy Frenchmen were seated, with their hats on, engaged in playing cards, and eating, while the rain dripped through the cracks in the deck upon the heads of the wretched travellers. From Lyons, resonant with the clatter of silk-looms, and beautiful for situation, the journey was made to Marseilles by land, affording excellent opportunity to examine the vestiges of the old Roman civilization of Southern Gaul. The remainder of the journey also was made by land, through the wild moun-

[1] Letters of a Traveller, pp. 16, 17.

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tains that skirt the Mediterranean, past Nice, famous for fruits and mosquitoes, and Genoa, the city of narrow streets and pale ladies, to Florence, which was reached on the 12th of September.

The poverty, oppression, and corruption which the traveller had seen in his journey provoked a comparison of the social institutions of France and Italy with those of his own land; and the following conclusion was the result of his reflections: —

"I think I shall return to America even a better patriot than when I left it. A citizen of the United States, travelling on the continent of Europe, finds the contrast between a government of power and a government of opinion forced upon him at every step. He finds himself delayed at every large town, and at every frontier of a kingdom or principality, to submit to a strict examination of the passport with which the jealousy of the rulers of these countries has compelled him to furnish himself. He sees everywhere guards and sentinels armed to the teeth, stationed in the midst of a population engaged in their ordinary occupations in a time of profound peace; and, to supply the place of the young and robust thus withdrawn from the labors of agriculture, he beholds women performing the work of the fields. . . . No American can see how much jealousy and force on the one hand, and necessity and fear on the other, have to do with keeping up the existing governments of Europe, without thanking Heaven that such is not the condition of his own country."[1]

Bryant's quarters in Florence overlooked the bridge of the Arno from which one of Cole's finest

[1] Letters of a Traveller, p. 23.

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landscapes had been taken, and the poet testified to the artist's fidelity to nature. Few could enjoy more fully the rich Italian scenery spread about him on every side; but his independence of judgment was not lost under the witching influence of skies for which tradition has claimed a beauty beyond what is native to them. "There is a great deal of prattle," he says, "about Italian skies. The skies and clouds of Italy, so far as I have had an opportunity of judging, do not present so great a variety of beautiful appearances as our own; but the Italian atmosphere is far more uniformly fine than ours." Had an American merchant ventured this frank opinion, his sensibility to æsthetic effects might be questioned. While the remark has force as the dictum of Nature's own laureate, it reveals one source of his power as a poet. "He is original," says Emerson, "because he is sincere, — a true painter of the face of this country, and of the sentiment of his own people. It is his proper praise, that he first, and he only, made known to mankind our Northern landscape, — its summer splendor, its autumn russet, its winter lights and glooms."

He regarded with disfavor the encroachments upon the domain of Nature which art and civilization had made on every side in Italy. "Not a tree," he complains, "is suffered to retain its natural shape, not a brook to flow in its natural chan-

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nel. An exterminating war is carried on against the natural herbage of the soil. The country is without woods and green fields." He misses with sadness many charms that belong to American landscapes, and laments that there is "no fine sweep of forest," "no broad expanse of meadow;" that there are "no ancient and towering trees clustering about the villas," "no rows of natural shrubbery following the course of the brooks and rivers:" but he glories in the grander features of the landscape, — "the lofty mountain-summits, bare precipices cleft with chasms, and pinnacles of rock piercing the sky." It is pleasing to find an American traveller who is brave enough, amid the beauties of a classic land, to assert the superior beauties of his own; and it is doubly pleasing when he can point out in detail the specific grounds of his claim.

Late in the autumn he proceeded to Pisa, "the very seat of idleness and slumber," affording the most decided contrast with gay and bustling Florence. Having procured a passport for the journey from Florence to Pisa, he presented himself at the gate, to depart, an hour later than the designated time, and was informed that his passport was not regular, and he must be detained. "What is the matter with the passport?" was the eager question. "The *visé* is of more than three days' standing," was the answer. The traveller pleaded in vain that

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an hour could make little difference. The officer maintained that the law would not suffer him to accept the passport. The traveller jingled some coins in his pocket, and the officer became compassionate. "Your case is a hard one," said the guard. "I suppose you are desirous to get on." The traveller urged the matter; and the officer remarked to a companion, that the party seemed to be decent people. Finally the passport was returned by the officer, with the statement that he was risking the loss of his place, and five days' imprisonment. A few coins slipped into his hand concluded the transaction, and Bryant's party passed on their way in silence. On reaching Pisa, he entered the city, to his surprise, without detention, or any examination of his baggage, though it contained dutiable articles. It was afterwards explained that he had been represented by his Italian servant as the American minister!

Early in the spring he visited Volterra, once a free city of considerable importance in republican Italy, an ancient Etruscan stronghold when Rome was a mere hamlet, but, when Bryant saw it, a wretched town of a few thousand inhabitants, notable in a land of music for containing only a single piano-forte, and that owned by a Florentine lady. From the tower of the fortress the traveller beheld in one view, on the 19th of March, fruit-trees blossoming in the dells of the mountain-side, and the snow-clad peaks of the Apennines.

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After a brief sojourn in Rome and Naples he returned to Florence, visited Venice, and, toward the end of June, began a northward journey through the Tyrol. In ascending the Alps, the party had the rare sight of a snow-storm in June.

"As we advanced," he says, "the clouds began to roll off from the landscape, disclosing here and there, through openings in their broad skirts as they swept along, glimpses of the profound valleys below us, and of the white sides and summits of mountains in the mid-sky above. At length the sun appeared, and revealed a prospect of such wildness, grandeur, and splendor as I had never before seen. Lofty peaks of the most fantastic shapes, with deep clefts between, sharp needles of rock, and overhanging crags, infinite in multitude, shot up everywhere around us, glistening in the new-fallen snow, with their wreaths of mist creeping along their sides. At intervals, swollen torrents, looking at a distance like long trains of foam, came thundering down the mountains, and, crossing the road, plunged into the verdant valleys which winded beneath. Beside the highway were fields of young grain, pressed to the ground with the snow; and, in the meadows, ranunculuses of the size of roses, large yellow violets, and a thousand other Alpine flowers of the most brilliant hues, were peeping through their white covering. We stopped to breakfast at a place called Landro, a solitary inn, in the midst of this grand scenery, with a little chapel beside it. The water from the dissolving snow was dripping merrily from the roof in a bright June sun."[1]

Descending into the valleys of the Tyrol, he proceeded to Innsbruck and Munich, spending

[1] Letters of a Traveller, p. 48.

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some time in the latter city. It was his intention to remain several years in Europe, in order to improve himself in the modern languages, and educate his children in foreign schools. His expectations were doomed to disappointment in an unlooked-for manner. Having received intelligence that his subordinate in the editorial management of "The Post" was disabled through illness, he hastened homeward early in 1836, after an absence of nearly two years.

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CHAPTER VI.

HARD WORK AT HOME.

1836-1845.

"Another change, and I see him
Where the city's ceaseless coil
Sends up a mighty murmur
From a thousand modes of toil."

WILLIAM LEGGETT, in whose charge "The Post" had been left during Bryant's trip to Europe, was a man of extraordinary powers. Among New-York journalists his rapidity in composition has long been proverbial. Bryant has himself described his qualities as an editor, and speaks of him as "fond of study, and delighted to trace principles to their remotest consequences, whither he was always willing to follow them. The quality of courage existed in him almost to excess, and he took a sort of pleasure in bearding public opinion. He wrote with surprising fluency, and often with eloquence; took broad views of the questions that came before him; and possessed the faculty of rapidly arranging the arguments which

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occurred to him in clear order, and stating them persuasively."[1] Bryant has also paid a glowing if not an extravagant tribute to Leggett's memory in a little poem on his death: —

"The words of fire, that from his pen
Were flung upon the fervid page,
Still move, still shake, the hearts of men
Amid a cold and coward age.

His love of truth, too warm, too strong,
For hope or fear to chain or chill,
His hate of tyranny and wrong,
Burn in the breasts he kindled still."

Leggett has given his ideal of a journalist in the words applied to Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun: "A gentleman steady in his principles; of nice honor; abundance of learning; brave as the sword he wears, and bold as a lion; a sure friend, and an irreconcilable enemy; who would lose his life readily to serve his country, and would not do a base thing to save it." It was believed by those who knew him best, that he nearly realized his own high conception of what an editor should be; only this is hardly a world for such an editor.

On his return to New York, Bryant found that his associate had offended the patrons of "The Post" by his management of the paper, placing it in a condition that it required much skill and

[1] History of The Evening Post.

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labor to improve. An ardent advocate of liberty in every form, Leggett had expressed himself vigorously in opposition to the riots which had disturbed abolition-meetings; and claimed, for the then hated agitators against slavery, an unrestrained freedom of speech. The finances of the journal had suffered with its popularity; and, when Bryant resumed the management, he found himself as much harassed by the purely business difficulties of the situation as by the necessity of conciliating an alienated public. Leggett had also offended advertisers in his zeal to secure typographical beauty in the appearance of the paper. The pictorial illustrations in the advertisements of "houses and lots for sale" were so annoying to his critical eye, that he ordered them to be omitted, to the dissatisfaction of his patrons. A step once taken was never retraced by Leggett, and two years of independence had proved a great detriment to the owners of "The Post."

After his retirement from "The Post" in 1836, Leggett established "The Plaindealer," in which he hoped to exercise untrammelled his gift for exposing shams. It was in this periodical that he made the attack upon Irving, noticed in another place. Having failed in the conduct of "The Plaindealer," he retired from journalism, and, soon after receiving a consular appointment from President Van Buren, ended his life in 1839.

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It is somewhat unusual to find a man of genius conspicuously successful in business, and poets especially have oftener been the sport of Fortune than her master. To the mind of Bryant thrift was a virtue, not a mark of inferiority, as poets have too often held it. Though prudence has been called "a rascally virtue," to him it was "wisdom applied to the ordinary affairs of life," as he has well defined it. He held that it "includes forecast, one of the highest operations of the intellect, and the due adjustment of means to ends, without which a man is useless to himself and to society, except as a blunderer by whose example others may be warned."[1]

Prudence and industry were the qualities needed to restore "The Post" to its place in the public regard, and both were abundantly possessed by the poet-editor. He gave his whole mind to the re-establishment and advancement of his paper, and soon reaped the reward of well-directed diligence in its improved condition.

Success was not won, however, by any sacrifice of conviction in the discussion of public issues. The times were fruitful in troublesome questions, and conflict was inevitable. Many of those radical differences of view which have since been settled only by the arbitrament of arms were dividing the minds of men. Free trade was ad-

[1] Orations and Addresses, p. 173.

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vocated in the South, and a tariff was demanded by the North. Slavery was creeping westward, and what were the rightful limits of its territory was a subject of dispute. Abolitionists were pressing their doctrines in Massachusetts, and slave-drivers were hurrying their chattels to the plains of the South-West. The problem of finance was agitating the commercial centres of the country. The proposed annexation of Texas was provoking an impassioned controversy. A war with Mexico was impending. Through this labyrinth of national questions Bryant threaded his way with caution, but never lost the clew which he had chosen, — the love of truth and country. Possibly sometimes wrong, he was never perverse. Surrounded by protectionists, he was a champion of free trade. In sympathy with the economic doctrines of the South, he was opposed to the extension of slavery. He regarded the doctrine of nullification as fallacious; though he opposed the tariff-law, which the South wished to nullify. He believed in the nationality of the Union, and the equal rights of all.

Bryant's controversies sometimes brought him into unpleasant relations with his contemporaries. A Democratic editor named Holland, who lived according to the old code of honor, being exasperated by some statements in "The Post," sent a challenge to its editor. At that time duelling had

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become less fashionable in New York than it had been half a century earlier, and was about to be consigned to the realm of the lost arts. The belligerent editor who challenged Bryant had previously had a brush with his testy associate, William Leggett; and had invited that gentleman to be killed by him, but in vain. In his reply to Holland's messenger, Bryant neither accepted nor declined the challenge, but said, that, when his antagonist had finished Leggett, his turn would come next! Thus the difficulty ended.

After Leggett's withdrawal from "The Post," Mr. Parke Godwin, who afterwards married Bryant's eldest daughter, became his assistant in the editorial work of the paper. Mr. Godwin, who has since taken an honorable place among men of letters by his translations from the German, his "History of France," and his "Biographical Dictionary," has furnished the following reminiscences of his father-in-law during this period of struggle: —

"During these years Mr. Bryant's occupations were most laborious. Promptly every morning, as early as eight o'clock, — sometimes as early as seven, — he was at his desk, engaged in the business of the day. His assistance was limited, owing to the pecuniary condition of the paper, and much of the heavy work fell upon him; but he shirked none of it; and, though not a rapid writer, he managed every day to put forth one or two leading articles of telling force. If I do not mistake, Mr. Bryant was the first of our journalists to adopt the English practice of 'leaders,' which has since

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become the universal habit of our journalism. Mr. Bryant possessed an almost intuitive quickness of judgment in the determination of public questions as they arose: he penetrated their bearings at a glance; and his decisions in regard to them, though sometimes erroneous, were for the most part in accordance with the development of events. Journalists, more than other men, are compelled to form their opinions on the spur of the moment, and are, therefore, more than other men, liable to mistakes; but Mr. Bryant's intellectual vision was so clear, his knowledge so broad, his ambitions so disinterested, and his moral sense so vividly alive to the slightest deflection of the needle of conscience from its pole, that his hastiest conclusions carried with them the marks and evidences of a ripened wisdom. His most superficial readers felt at once that here is a man in whom the utmost confidence might be reposed." [1]

Mr. Godwin informs us that Bryant always wrote his editorials in the office, and never at his home. His leisure hours were devoted to reflection and communion with the best authors in several languages. "He steadily refused to carry the shop with him; seldom, if ever, conversing on the exciting questions of the day at his home, — preferring to read some fascinating book, or to talk on general topics with cultivated friends. By this means he was enabled to bring to his desk a mind ever alert and fresh, fancies ever new, and language that was choice and picturesque."

In the summer of 1841 the editorial pen was laid aside for a short tour on the prairies of

[1] The Evening Post, July 10, 1878.

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Illinois, then the abode of prairie-wolves and rough settlers, with whom lynch law was a necessary safeguard to the honest portion of the community. The letters to "The Post," written at this time, were afterwards published, with those sent from Europe, in the volume entitled "Letters of a Traveller."

In 1842 Bryant published, in New York and London, a collection of verses, with the title of "The Fountain, and Other Poems," a duodecimo volume of one hundred pages, containing, with other poems, "The Winds," "The Green-Mountain Boys," "The Death of Schiller," "Life," "A Presentiment," "The Future Life," and "An Evening Reverie." In quantity it was not a large result for ten years' labor; but in quality it was rich, — the fragrant distillation of many blossoms. After stating that his name had become "classical in the literature of the language," "The North-American Review" makes the following comments on the poet: —

"Mr. Bryant, during a long career of authorship, has written but comparatively little; but that little is of untold price; ὀλίγον τε φίλον τε, — little, but precious and dear. What exquisite taste! what a delicate ear for the music of poetical language! what a fine and piercing sense of the beauties of Nature, down to the minutest and most evanescent things! He walks forth into the fields and forests; and not a green or rosy tint, not a flower or herb or tree, not a tiny leaf or gossamer tissue, not a strange or familiar

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plant, escapes his vigilant glance. The naturalist is not keener in searching out the science of Nature than he in detecting all its poetical aspects, effects, analogies, and contrasts. To him the landscape is a speaking and teaching page. He sees its pregnant meaning, and all its hidden relations to the life of man. For him the shadow and sunshine that chase each other in swift rivalry over the plain are suggestive of deep meaning and touching comparisons. For him the breath of evening and of morning have an articulate voice. To him the song of birds is a symbol of that deeper song of joy and thankfulness that ascends forever from the heart of man to the Giver of every good. To him the ocean utters its solemn hymns, and he can well interpret them to others." [1]

High as this praise is, the poet no longer bore the palm alone. A new race of singers had risen to contend for the honors of the first place in the ranks of the nation's bards. "Among American poets," says the critic just quoted, "his name stands, if not the very first, at least among the two or three foremost." Only a few years later Edgar Allan Poe wrote, "It will never do to claim for Bryant a genius of the loftiest order; but there has been latterly, since the days of Mr. Longfellow and Mr. Lowell, a growing disposition to deny him *genius* in *any* respect. He is now commonly spoken of as 'a man of high poetical *talent*, very *correct*, with a warm appreciation of the beauty of Nature, and great descriptive powers, but rather too much of the old-school manner of

[1] North-American Review, October, 1842, p. 501.

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Cowper, Goldsmith, and Young. This is the truth, but not the whole truth. Mr. Bryant has genius, and that of a marked character; but it has been overlooked by modern schools, because deficient in those externals which have become, in a measure, symbolical of those schools." [1]

In the spring of 1843 the poet-editor made an extensive journey through the South, visiting Washington, Richmond, Charleston, Savannah, and St. Augustine. The features of the country and the manners of the people were closely observed, and reported in letters to "The Post." On his return from the South he spent the summer in visiting New England, making an excursion through Vermont and New Hampshire. His experiences in this journey also were written out for his paper, and may be found related in the "Letters of a Traveller."

In 1845 the prosperity of "The Post" was so far assured that Bryant felt justified in leaving it in the care of others, and determined to visit Europe once more. He embarked for Liverpool in April in company with Mr. Charles M. Leupp, a wealthy merchant of New York, and a connoisseur of the fine arts.

[1] Poe's Works, vol. iii. p. 181.

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CHAPTER VII.

IN MANY LANDS.

1845-1850.

"Now, far on the North Sea islands,
Sees day on the midnight sky;
Now gathers the fair strange fruitage
Where the isles of the Southland lie."

AFTER a delightful voyage, in which, says Bryant, the vessel "slid along over a placid sea before the gentlest zephyrs that ever swept the ocean," the travellers reached Liverpool about the middle of May. Near the end of the month they proceeded to Manchester, and thence to Derby. An incident occurred during the coach-ride through Derbyshire, too full of significance to be omitted here. "Among our fellow-passengers," says Bryant, "was a powerfully-made man, who had the appearance of being a commercial traveller, and was very communicative on the subject of the Peak, its caverns, its mines, and the old ruined castle of the Peverils, built, it is said, by one of the Norman invaders of England. He spoke in

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the Derbyshire dialect, with a strong provincial accent. When he was asked whether the castle was not the one spoken of by Scott in his 'Peveril of the Peak,' he replied, 'Scott? Scott? I dunna know him.'"[1] Bryant was fortunate enough, however, to halt at the inn of one John Clark, who had not only heard of Scott, but in former days, when a coachman, had driven the coach that brought him to the Peak, and knew that the ruined castle was the abode of Scott's Peveril.

On his arrival in London, Bryant was honored with a dinner given by Edward Everett, then the American minister at the court of St. James. Here he met Samuel Rogers and Thomas Moore. When presented to Rogers, Bryant spoke of a letter of introduction which he would have the honor to present. The older poet interrupted him with a kindly wave of the hand, and replied, "It is quite unnecessary. I have long known you through your writings."[2] The introduction was followed by an invitation to breakfast with Rogers at his home. It was at this breakfast that Bryant became acquainted with several distinguished Englishmen, including Sir Charles Eastlake, and Richard Monckton Milnes, afterward Lord Houghton.

While in London, the traveller gave much attention to the works of art then on exhibition, and

[1] Letters of a Traveller, p. 155.
[2] The Bryant Memorial Pamphlet, p. 25.

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expressed some opinions that are of interest to all lovers of American art. He saw, at the moment of Powers's great triumph, the statue that made that artist's reputation and fortune.

"The town is yet talking [he says] of a statue of a Greek slave by our countryman Powers, which was to be seen, a few days since, at a print-shop in Pall Mall. I went to look at it. The statue represents a Greek girl exposed naked for sale in the slave-market. Her hands are fettered, the drapery of her nation lies at her feet, and she is shrinking from the public gaze. I looked at it with surprise and delight. I was dazzled with the soft fulness of the outlines, the grace of the attitude, the noble yet sad expression of the countenance, and the exquisite perfection of the workmanship. I could not help acknowledging a certain literal truth in the expression of Byron concerning a beautiful statue, that it

'fills
The air around with beauty.'" [1]

Bryant saw nothing to astonish him in the exhibition of paintings by the Royal Academy, when he compared them with the pictures of the New-York Academy of the Arts of Design, "except that some of the worst pictures were hung in the most conspicuous places." He had little admiration for the works on exhibition by Turner and Haydon. Those of the first he thought "mere blotches of white paint, with streaks of yellow and red, and without any intelligible design;"

[1] Letters of a Traveller, p. 164.

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and Haydon was conspicuous for "a most hideous picture of Uriel and Satan." Yet he admits that Turner was "a great artist, and a man of genius." In a critic less honorable than Bryant, this severity might appear to be a patriotic defence of American artists, whose pictures were "all hung so high as to be out of sight, except one, and that was in what is called the condemned room, where only a glimmer of light enters, and where the hanging committee are in the practice of thrusting any such pictures as they cannot help exhibiting, but wish to keep in the dark."

It is well known that one of the chief attractions of New-York City, the Central Park, was first suggested by a letter to "The Post," written by Bryant when in London. A day spent in the great parks of that city — Kensington Gardens, Hyde Park, and Regent's Park, which have been happily called "the lungs of London" — convinced him of their great value to public health and happiness, and gave origin to the following hints to the people of New York: —

"The population of your city, increasing with such prodigious rapidity, your sultry summers, and the corrupt atmosphere generated in hot and crowded streets, make it a cause of regret, that, in laying out New York, no preparation was made, while it was yet practicable, for a range of parks and public gardens along the central part of the island or elsewhere, to remain perpetually for the refreshment and rec-

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reation of the citizens during the torrid heats of the warm season. There are yet unoccupied lands on the island which might, I suppose, be procured for the purpose, and which, on account of their rocky and uneven surface, might be laid out into surpassingly beautiful pleasure-grounds; but, while we are discussing the subject, the advancing population of the city is sweeping over them, and covering them from our reach."[1]

From London Bryant proceeded to Edinburgh (the finest city he had ever seen), visited Stirling Castle, saw the battle-fields of Bannockburn and Falkirk, and passed through the Highlands to Glasgow. As he rowed over Loch Katrine, the romantic scenes of Scott's "Lady of the Lake," "There," said the guide, "is the spot in the Trosachs where Fitz James lost his gallant gray. . . . Yonder is the island where Douglas concealed his daughter. Under that broad oak, whose boughs almost dip into the water, was the place where her skiff was moored. On that rock, covered with heath, Fitz James stood, and wound his bugle. Near it, but out of sight, is the skiff that received him on board. . . . In that dwelling Rob Roy was born."

After visiting the habitation of Baillie Jarvie, and the old tower of the Tolbooth where Rob Roy was confined in Glasgow, he made an excursion to Ayr (the birthplace of Burns), saw the little old

[1] Letters of a Traveller, p. 170.

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roofless kirk of Alloway, the bridge across the Doon where Tam O'Shanter met the witches in his midnight ride, and the clay-built cottage — now an alehouse — where Burns was born.

Late in July, Bryant left Glasgow for Ireland, visiting Belfast and Dublin. Returning to England, he heard Cobden, who impressed him as having "a certain New-England sharpness and shrewdness in his way of dealing with a subject;" and Fox, "one of the most fluent and ingenious speakers" he had ever heard in a popular assembly. After a brief visit in Paris, he made a tour through the Netherlands and Germany, passing through Brussels, Waterloo, Antwerp, Rotterdam, the Hague, Amsterdam, Utrecht, Düsseldorf, and Cologne; proceeding to Italy in October. At the end of the year (1845) he returned to New York.

We have a pen-portrait of the poet soon after his return, sketched by Edgar Allan Poe, who was then writing his keen articles on "The Literati of New York:"—

"He is now fifty-two years of age," says Poe. "In height he is, perhaps, five feet nine. His frame is rather robust. His features are large, but thin. His countenance is sallow, nearly bloodless. His eyes are piercing gray, deep set, with large projecting eyebrows. His mouth is wide and massive; the expression of the smile hard, cold, even sardonic. The forehead is broad, with prominent organs of ideality; a good deal bald; the hair thin and grayish; as are also the whiskers, which he wears in a simple style. His bearing is

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quite distinguished, full of the aristocracy of intellect. In general, he looks in better health than before his last visit to England. He seems active, — physically and morally energetic. His dress is plain to the extreme of simplicity, although of late there is a certain degree of Anglicism about it.

"In character no man stands more lofty than Bryant. The peculiarly melancholy expression of his countenance has caused him to be accused of harshness, or coldness of heart. Never was there a greater mistake. His soul is charity itself, in all respects generous and noble. His manners are undoubtedly reserved.

"Of late days he has nearly, if not altogether, abandoned literary pursuits, although still editing with unabated vigor 'The New-York Evening Post.' He is married (Mrs. Bryant still living), has two daughters (one of them Mrs. Parke Godwin), and is residing for the present at Vice-Chancellor McCown's, near the junction of Warren and Church Streets."[1]

The sight of foreign lands had renewed his desire to know more of his own country from personal inspection, and the years from 1846 to 1849 were largely occupied in long excursions to various parts of the United States. In these journeys, some of them occupying several months, his correspondence is dated from the Great Lakes of the North-West, the towns of Pennsylvania, the forests of Maine, and the mountains of New Hampshire. A glance at his letters written to "The Post" at this time gives a vivid realization

[1] Poe's Works, vol. iii. pp. 187, 188.

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of the rapid march of material progress since made in all parts of this country. They tell of days when the lumbering stage-coach was the principal conveyance between the towns of Illinois, and describe great cities as new settlements; and these are the letters of a traveller then past the meridian of life, and who was living but yesterday!

In the spring of 1849 Bryant made a tour through the South, extending his journey to the Island of Cuba. Leaving New York in March, he took passage by sea for Savannah. From Savannah he proceeded to Augusta, and thence to Charleston, where he embarked for Havana.

The letters from Cuba are more interesting than those from other countries which he had at this time described, partly because the island had been less frequently discussed in works of travel, but chiefly because it presented a new phase of Nature to a careful student of her diversities. Not a quality of the climate, not a peculiarity of the breeze, not a form of vegetation, not a phenomenon of the landscape, not a configuration of the clouds, escapes the eye of the vigilant observer. It seems as if he were fated never to meet with adventures. No traveller has met with fewer incidents. The whole interest of his sketches rests upon the detailed accuracy of his pictures, sometimes of men and manners, but chiefly of natural scenery. He transports us to a tropical for-

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est; and we see the royal palm, with its tall, straight, white columnar trunk, and "Corinthian capital of leaves," in colonnades "nobler than any of the porticos to the ancient Egyptian temples." If he describes a cottage, he is sure not to omit to mention "the grove of plantains behind; a thicket of bamboo near the door, waving its willow-like sprays in the wind; a pair of mango-trees near, hung with fruit just ripening, and reddish blossoms just opening; and a cocoa-tree or two, lifting high above the rest its immense feathery leaves and its clusters of green nuts." His pages are overrun with vines, and fragrant with tropical blossoms. He who loved the fringed gentian and the yellow violet that grew in the dells and on the hillsides at Cummington found his chief delight among the damask roses and orange-blossoms that bloomed on the bosom of the Queen of the Antilles.

Nothing impressed his mind more profoundly than the Cuban mode of burial, — piling the dead bodies in trenches, one upon the other, coffinless, and without funeral service. The lines of "Thanatopsis" were never lost from the poet's memory; never ceased to color his thoughts and feelings. The cemetery of the Campo Santo seems ever uppermost in his mind as he thinks of the people at their sports. He tries to be humorous as he describes the principal diversion of the island: —

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"Cuba," he says, "seemed to me a great poultry-yard. I heard the crowing of the cocks in all quarters; for the game-cock is the noisiest and most boastful of birds, and is perpetually uttering his notes of defiance. In the villages I saw the veterans of the pit, a strong-legged race, with their combs cropped smooth to the head, the feathers plucked from every part of the body except their wings, and the tail docked like that of a coach-horse, picking up their food in the lanes among the chickens. One old cripple I remember to have seen in the little town of Guines, stiff with wounds received in combat, who had probably got a furlough for life, and who, while limping among his female companions, maintained a sort of strut in his gait, and now and then stopped to crow defiance to the world. The peasants breed game-cocks, and bring them to market; amateurs in the town train them for private amusement. Dealers in game-cocks are as common as horse-jockeys with us, and every village has its cock-pit."[1]

But, before he leaves the subject, he describes a throng of excited people "engaged in the brutal sport, with eager gestures and loud cries;" and "cannot help thinking how soon this noisy crowd will lie in heaps in the pits of the Campo Santo." The graceful Spanish dances, "resembling the undulations of the sea in its gentlest moods," are mentioned; but the dread thought still haunts him, and he cannot help thinking, as he looks on "the gay crowd, on the quaint maskers, and the dancers, whose flexible limbs seem swayed to and fro by the breath of the music, that all this must soon end at the Campo Santo."

[1] Letters of a Traveller, p. 367.

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With headquarters at Havana, he made numerous excursions to various points of interest in the island, — the coffee-estates of San Antonio and the sugar-plantations of Matanzas, — returning to New York in May.

The following July (1849) finds him once more in London, criticising the art-galleries, and expressing opinions and prophecies regarding the politics of England. During this visit he once more met Rogers, then an old man, full of whims and crotchets. The aged poet was impressed with the decay of greatness in the declining years of life. "Our poets seem to be losing their minds," said he. "Campbell's son was in a madhouse; and, if the father had been put there in the last years of his life, it would have been the proper place for him. Bowles became weak-minded; and as for Southey, you know what happened to him. Moore was here the other day, and I asked, 'Moore, how long have you been in town?' — 'Three or four days,' he replied. 'What! three or four days, and not let me know it?' — 'I beg pardon,' said he, putting his hand to his forehead: 'I believe I came to town this morning.' As to Wordsworth, a gentleman who saw him lately said to me, 'You would not find Wordsworth much changed: he talks rationally.'"[1]

After a voyage through the Orkneys, past the

[1] Scribner's Monthly, August, 1878.

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Fitful Head of Scott's "Pirate," Bryant found himself, in the middle of July, among the Shetland Isles, climbing the towering cliffs that frown upon the encroaching sea, and break its resounding waves as they roar about their cavernous bases. Here, as everywhere, the poet-botanist discerns every trace of vegetation; and as he describes the wall of rock that forms the Noup of the Noss, descending perpendicularly six hundred feet into the sea, he does not fail to notice that the upper part of its face is "tapestried with herbage and flowers, which the perpetual moisture of the atmosphere keeps always fresh, — daisies nodding in the wind, and the crimson phlox, seeming to set the cliffs on flame; yellow buttercups, and a variety of other plants in bloom." The Shetland scenery presented a wild aspect of Nature that gave him great delight; and he was loath to bid farewell to "its grand precipices, its winding straits, its remains of a remote and rude antiquity, its little horses, little cows, and little sheep, its seafowl, its larks, its flowers, and its hardy and active people."

Returning through Scotland, he visited Paris, then in a state of excitement over the recent revolution and the Italian wars, and under the rule of the bayonet. After a brief stay he travelled through Germany, then also under military rule. He found "the cities along the Rhine crowded with soldiers; the sound of the drum was heard

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among the hills covered with vines; women were trundling loaded wheelbarrows, and carrying panniers like asses, to earn the taxes extorted to support the men who were stalking in uniform." From Heidelberg he hastened through the charming valley of the Neckar to Heilbronn, hoping to avoid the sight of the odious soldiery, but found troops posted even in the smallest villages. At Heilbronn he took the railway for Stuttgart, and entered that city in the midst of an army of military passengers. At Ulm "the gentry in epaulets" were gathered in swarms, and at Munich they were no less numerous. At the latter city he heard of the fall of the Hungarian Republic, the treason of Görgey, and Kossuth's flight into Turkey.

Passing through the southern part of Bavaria, — which reminded him of his own New England, with the important exceptions that the houses were of Swiss architecture, and the women were at the plough, — he crossed Lake Constance into Switzerland. His joy at reaching an asylum of freedom, after the scenes of oppression he had just witnessed, was almost overwhelming; and he says he could "almost have kneeled and kissed the shore of the hospitable republic. And really it was beautiful enough," he adds, "for such a demonstration of affection; for nothing could be lovelier than the declivities of that shore, with its woods and orchards and grassy meadows, and green hol-

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lows running upward to the mountain-tops, all fresh with a shower which had just passed, and now glittering in the sunshine, and interspersed with large Swiss houses bearing quaintly-carved galleries and broad overhanging roofs; while to the east rose the glorious summits of the Alps, mingling with the clouds."

After a visit to Zurich, Bern, Freiburg, and Geneva, he returned to France, passing through Lyons to Paris, which he reached in the middle of September. Later in the autumn (1849) he crossed the Atlantic, not to recross it for several years. For a long period he had been a bird of passage, flitting from shore to shore of the Old World and the New. Weary with his wanderings, and prouder of his own land from what he had seen of others, he was glad once more to enjoy the quiet life of home.

Soon after his return, the letters written to "The Post" during his travels in various parts of the world were collected in a volume, and published in New York by G. P. Putnam & Sons, with the title, "Letters of a Traveller; or, Notes of Things seen in Europe and America." The volume attained, as the author expected, only a very moderate success.

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CHAPTER VIII.

HOME-LIFE.

1850-1857.

'I see him again at his dwelling,
Where, over the little lake,
The rose-trees droop in their beauty
To meet the image they make."

TO most civilized men the converging point of all human activities is home. For its possession they toil patiently and hopefully through dreary years of privation; for its enrichment the fleets of commerce whiten every sea, penetrating far into the zones of perpetual heat and of perpetual cold; for its ornamentation the fine arts in modern times exist almost as exclusively as in the early ages they did for the temples of the gods; to define its rights, legislators meet in solemn conclaves; to fix the penalties of violating its sanctity, learned jurists adjust the delicate scales of law and ethics; for its protection, soldiers go forth to battle; and even the weak become strong when roused for its preservation.

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The most beautiful part of our poet's life is that quiet home-enjoyment of books and nature that opened a perennial fountain of youth in his mind and heart. During the period indicated at the head of this chapter, — with the exception of the year 1852, when he paid a brief visit to Cuba, Europe, and the Holy Land, — his daily experience contained little to disturb the gentle and tranquil flow of domestic enjoyment. A few hours in the office of "The Post" each day brought him in contact with the business of his profession; but his cares were easily laid aside when he took his departure from the scene of labor.

In 1845, before his second European tour, Bryant purchased an estate lying along Hempstead Harbor, on Long Island, far enough from the metropolis to be a secluded country residence, yet not so far as to make access to his business difficult. The building upon it was an old-time square structure, built in 1787 by a plain Quaker, and contained large old-fashioned rooms. In 1846, after his second return from Europe, Bryant remodelled the house to suit his own tastes, adding lattices to the porches for clambering vines, and building bay-windows for the sake of the landscape. Outbuildings of a picturesque form and grouping were erected, and choice shade and fruit trees were planted in the grounds. The

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hamlet near by he named "Roslyn," from the fact recorded in the town annals, that, when the British left Long Island, they marched out of Hempstead to the tune of "Roslyn Castle." The estate itself he called "Cedarmere," and by this name it is now known.

It is a spot fit for a poet's home. Though sheltered by the hills on the north, the windows of the mansion command a noble landscape, in which green fields, the bright waters of the bay, and the sails of the vessels on its bosom, blend in a picture of surpassing loveliness. A broad green lawn below the house rims "the little lake," that flows into a stream between banks of flowering shrubs and tangled evergreens. The waters turn a little mill, housed in what seems to be a Swiss cottage overrun with vines, till the music of its machinery corrects the illusion of the eye through the perception of the ear. In the garden a small conservatory protects the blooming exotics during the cold season of the year, and numerous hotbeds assist the tender plants in spring. On the slope beyond the garden stands a

> "lofty group
> Of ancient pear-trees, that with spring-time burst
> Into such breadth of bloom,"

beneath whose branches the poet enjoyed his "annual festival of bees," and "songs of birds within

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their leafy screen." Here is the swing for the little people of the neighborhood; and every year, when the season of fruitage came, the poet would sit and hear

> " shouts
> Of joy from the children gathering up the fruit
> Shaken in August from the willing boughs."

On the hill above the mansion are apple-trees planted by the poet's own hand, with sombre evergreens and stately maples. From among these trees, celebrated in the poet's verses, we look away over the wooded hills far out on the waters of the bay, dotted with white sails, and ploughed by the majestic steamers that move like vast swans upon its surface, till the clouds and the low hills beyond limit our vision with a dim horizon.

Within, all is in keeping with the poetical surroundings of the place: and we may speak in the present tense; for there have been few important changes at Cedarmere for many years. Its proprietor's early travels filled its rooms with mementos of many lands, some of great and curious interest. Always an admirer of art, and long intimate with artists, his fine taste enriched his walls with the choicest paintings and engravings. Morse, Weir, Huntington, Ingraham, Wall, Durand, Verbruyck, Inman, Cole, and Gourlie were among his earliest friends in New York. When

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the Academy of Design was first established, he had interested himself in its prosperity so far as to deliver a course of lectures on Greek and Roman mythology for its benefit. Yet his private collection was not a large one; the number of pieces being, with him, of less importance than their merit.

His library was equally choice, though large for a private collection. It embraced standard authorities in every branch of general knowledge, and was especially rich in works on theology and economic science. In polite literature, particularly poetry, it was even more complete. The ancient classics in the best editions stood on the shelves, with the masterpieces of French, German, Spanish, and Italian letters. In all these languages Bryant read much, and some of his translations show how well.

Elegance, however, never took the place of comfort in the poet's household. The large, well-ventilated rooms, and the open grates, are suggestive of the same regard for hygienic laws in the household economy that was displayed in his own personal dress and habits.

After the marriage of his daughter to Mr. Parke Godwin, his family consisted of his wife and his daughter Julia, who continued to brighten his home during his entire lifetime.

Although he also had a New-York residence, and

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finally came into possession of the homestead at Cummington, the rural retreat at Roslyn was for the remainder of his life his favorite home; and there he spent most of the time, except during the months of winter. These were passed in the city. Cedarmere, however, will always be known as Bryant's home. There he found the retirement, and fellowship with Nature, that were his chief pleasures; there he kept the most valuable of his books; there he continued to write his poems to the last years of life.

In Curtis's "Homes of American Authors" we have the following sketch of the poet as he was known to his friends during the earlier period of his residence at Roslyn: —

"Mr. Bryant's habits of life have a smack of ascetism, although he is the disciple of none of the popular schools which, under various forms, claim to rule the present world in that direction. Milk is more familiar to his lips than wine; yet he does not disdain the 'cheerful hour,' over which moderation presides. He eats sparingly of animal food; but he is by no means afraid to enjoy roast goose, lest he should outrage the manes of his ancestors, like some modern enthusiasts. He 'hears no music,' if it be fantastical; yet his ear is finely attuned to the varied harmonies of wood and wave. His health is delicate, yet he is almost never ill; his life laborious, yet carefully guarded against excessive and exhaustive fatigue. He is a man of rule, but none the less tolerant of want of method in others; strictly self-governed, but not prone to censure the unwary or the weak-willed. In religion he is at once catholic and devout, and to moral excel-

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lence no soul bows lower. Placable we can perhaps hardly call him, for impressions on his mind are almost indelible; but it may with the strictest truth be said, that it requires a great offence or a great unworthiness to make an enemy of him, so strong is his sense of justice. Not amid the bustle and dust of the political arena, cased in armor offensive and defensive, is a champion's more intimate self to be estimated; but in the pavilion or the bower, where, in robes of ease, and with all professional ferocity laid aside, we see his natural form and complexion, and hear in placid domestic tones the voice so lately thundering above the fight. So we willingly follow Mr. Bryant to Roslyn; see him musing on the pretty rural bridge that spans the fish-pond; or taking the oar in his daughter's fairy boat; or pruning trees; or talking over farm-matters with his neighbors; or . . . sitting calm and happy in his pleasant library, surrounded by the friends he loves to draw around him; or listening to the prattle of infant-voices, quite as much at home there as under their own more especial roof, — his daughter's, — within the same enclosure.

"In person Mr. Bryant is quite slender, symmetrical, and well-poised; in carriage, eminently firm and self-possessed. He is fond of long rural walks and of gymnastic exercises, on all which his health depends. Poetical composition tries him severely, — so severely, that his efforts of that kind are necessarily rare. His are no holiday verses; and those who urge his producing a long poem are, perhaps, proposing that he should, in gratifying their admiration, build for himself a monument in which he would be self-enveloped. Let us rather content ourselves with asking 'a few more of the same,' especially of the later poems, in which, certainly, the poet trusts his fellows with a nearer and more intimate view of his inner and peculiar self than was his wont in earlier times. Let him more and more give human voice to

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woods and waters, and, in acting as the accepted interpreter of Nature, speak fearlessly to the heart as well as to the eye. His countrymen were never more disposed to hear him with delight; for, since the public demand for his poems has placed a copy in every house in the land, [?] the taste for them has steadily increased, and the national pride in the writer's genius become a generous enthusiasm, which is ready to grant him an apotheosis while he lives."

The coming of spring, when he might leave the crowded city and visit the country-side, was always a glad season for him. His joy at its return finds expression more than once, but especially in these lines to his daughter, entitled "An Invitation to the Country:" —

'Already, close by our summer dwelling,
The Easter sparrow repeats her song:
A merry warbler, she chides the blossoms, —
The idle blossoms that sleep so long.

The bluebird chants from the elm's long branches
A hymn to welcome the budding year;
The south wind wanders from field to forest,
And softly whispers, 'The Spring is here!'

Come, daughter mine, from the gloomy city,
Before those lays from the elm have ceased:
The violet breathes by our door as sweetly
As in the air of her native East.

. . . . . .

There is no glory in star or blossom
Till looked upon by a loving eye;
There is no fragrance in April breezes
Till breathed with joy as they wander by.

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Come, Julia dear; for the sprouting willows,
The opening flowers, and the gleaming brooks,
And hollows, green in the sun, are waiting
Their dower of beauty from thy glad looks."

Bryant was often called upon to appear on public occasions of a literary character, and at dinners in honor of distinguished men who received the hospitality of his adopted city. In 1848 he had delivered a commemorative oration on the death of Thomas Cole — the painter of "The Voyage of Life" — before the National Academy of Design. In December, 1851, he was invited to preside at a banquet given in honor of Louis Kossuth, the Hungarian republican, who was then receiving ovations from his American admirers. Kossuth had himself been an editor in Hungary, and the banquet was given by the press of New York. The following extract will serve as a specimen of Bryant's eloquence on these occasions: —

"I have compared the exiled Hungarians to the great men of our own history. Difficulty, my brethren, is the nurse of greatness, — a harsh nurse, who roughly rocks her foster-children into strength and athletic proportion. The mind grappling with great aims, and wrestling with mighty impediments, grows by a certain necessity to their stature. Scarce any thing so convinces me of the capacity of the human intellect for indefinite expansion in the different stages of its being as this power of enlarging itself to the height and compass of surrounding emergencies. These men have been trained to greatness by a quicker and surer method than a peaceful country and a tranquil period can know.

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"But it is not merely, or even principally, for their personal qualities, that we honor them: we honor them for the cause in which they so gloriously failed. Great issues hung upon that cause, and great interests of mankind were crushed by its downfall. I was on the continent of Europe when the treason of Görgey laid Hungary bound at the feet of the Czar. Europe was at that time in the midst of the re-action: the ebb tide was rushing violently back, sweeping all that the friends of freedom had planned into the black bosom of the deep. In France the liberty of the press was extinct; Paris was in a state of siege; the soldiery of that republic had just quenched in blood the freedom of Rome. Austria had suppressed liberty in Northern Italy. Absolutism was restored in Prussia: along the Rhine and its tributaries, and in the towns and villages of Wirtemberg and Bavaria, troops withdrawn from the barracks and garrisons filled the streets, and kept the inhabitants quiet with the bayonet at their breasts. Hungary, at that moment, alone upheld — and upheld with a firm hand and dauntless heart — the blazing torch of liberty. To Hungary were turned up the eyes, to Hungary clung the hopes, of all who did not despair of the freedom of Europe.

"I recollect, that while the armies of Russia were moving, like tempests from the north, upon the Hungarian host, the progress of events was watched with the deepest solicitude by the people of Germany. I was at that time in Munich, the splendid capital of Bavaria. The Bavarians seemed for the time to have put off their usual character, and scrambled for the daily prints, wet from the press, with such eagerness, that I almost thought myself in America. The news of the catastrophe at last arrived: Görgey had betrayed the cause of Hungary, and yielded to the demands of the Russians. Immediately a funeral gloom settled, like a noonday darkness, upon the city. I heard the muttered

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exclamations of the people, 'It is all over! the last hope of European liberty is gone!'"[1]

On none of these occasions did his words or manner assume the tone of adulation or servility to greatness. "I have seen him," says Mr. George W. Curtis, "at some offering of homage to a foreign guest, skilfully withstanding the current of excessive compliment natural at such times, yet without morose dissent, and only by a shrewd and playful humor, and with a most friendly regard for the rites of hospitality, gently reminding us that manly and self-respecting courtesy never bows too low."

A more solemn duty was placed upon Bryant in the following year, when invited to pronounce a discourse on the life, character, and writings of James Fenimore Cooper the novelist, who had been his friend at the beginning of his literary career in New York.

In 1854 a complete collection of his poems was published in two volumes. "When the last hour shall come to Bryant," says a contemporary critic, "how much will he leave behind him that cannot fade or die! For ourselves, so completely interwoven with our own, for at least a quarter of a century, have been Bryant's recorded emotions and interpretations of Nature, that we scarcely dare trust our pen with the expression of the

[1] Orations and Addresses, pp. 262-264.

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honor and reverence with which we regard the teachings of his verse, lest we might be thought to exaggerate them. The truth is, that he has so wedded himself to the elements, to the great features of Nature, of which he has been so true and faithful an exponent, that it will be impossible, with those who have appreciated his deep feeling and fervent poetry, hereafter to dissociate him from them."[1]

[1] Knickerbocker Magazine, December, 1854, p 635.

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CHAPTER IX.

A JOURNEY IN SPAIN.

1857-1859.

"He has crossed the mighty ocean,
To realms that lie afar,
In the region of ancient story,
Beneath the morning-star."

BRYANT'S fondness for travel, and the romantic charms of old Spain, led him once more across the ocean for the purpose of spending some months in the cities and among the mountains of that land of chivalry. Early in the summer of 1857, after a brief visit to Paris, he travelled with his family through Germany, Switzerland, and Southern France, proceeding in the autumn through the passes of the Pyrenees and the Basque Provinces by diligence, sometimes slowly drawn through the grand scenery of these regions by teams of oxen. The letters in which he describes this journey partake of the freshness and picturesqueness of the scenes among which they were penned, and have for American readers all the in-

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terest that gathers round the ancient monasteries, the moss-grown cathedrals, the crumbling palaces, and the ferocious sports, of that land of story and of song. An entire month was spent in the passage from San Sebastian, in the north of Spain, to Madrid. During this period the poet and his family ate, drank, slept, and travelled in the Spanish fashion, coming constantly into contact with the people of the provinces in their every-day life. Nowhere in our literature is that life presented with more graphic detail than in Bryant's letters.

At Las Huelgas, where Ferdinand received his knighthood, and where all the infantas of Spain are buried, the lady abbess of the convent, "a lady of a lively aspect," inquired, "And these friends of ours — where do they come from?" — "From America." — "Ah! I have a nephew in America, at Cordova in Peru; and he likes the place much: perhaps they know him." "We had a little difficulty," runs the narrative, "in making clear to her mind the distance between New York and Cordova in Peru; but she went on to give the history of her nephew, his wanderings, and his settlement at last in Peru."[1]

During a sojourn of three weeks in Madrid, Bryant enjoyed the hospitality of the American minister, Mr. Dodge, the ex-ambassador from Spain to the United States, Mr. Calderon, and many other

[1] Letters from Spain, p. 99.

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distinguished gentleman. "Here at Madrid," he writes, "they live on very unceremonious terms with each other, dropping in at each other's houses in the evening, and calling each other by their Christian names, without the prefix of Don or Doña. They get, perhaps, if any thing, a cup of tea or chocolate, and a *biscocho*. I was several times at the house of a literary lady of Madrid, and saw there some of the most eminent men of Spain, statesmen, jurists, ecclesiastics, authors, leaders of the liberal party, and chiefs of the absolutists, who came and went with almost as little ceremony as if they met on the Prado. The *tertúlia* is something more than this: there is more dress, illumination, numbers; but the refreshments are almost as frugally dispensed. The stranger in Spain does not find himself excluded from native society as he does in Italy, but is at once introduced to it on the same footing with the natives." He found one strong objection, however, to the social habits of the Spanish capital, — that visitors began to call on their friends about nine oclock in the evening, and remained till "some time among the short hours beyond midnight." The example, he says, was set by the queen, who took her morning ride through the city soon after sunset!

During his stay in Madrid, Bryant attended the ceremony of conferring the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by the University. Aside from the

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interest attaching to this ceremony from the magnificent manner in which it is performed, there is a reason which every American will appreciate why the following description should be quoted here:—

"At the farther end of the hall was a raised platform, on which were seated the officers of the university, at a sort of desk; and in front of them, on benches on each side, the doctors of the different sciences, in their peculiar costume. All wore ample black gowns; but they were distinguished from each other by their caps, and the broad capes on their shoulders, both of which were of lustrous silks. The capes and caps of the doctors of theology were white; those of the doctors of philosophy, blue; the men of the law flamed in red; the men of medicine glistened in yellow; the doctors of pharmacy glowed in purple. On each side of the presiding officer stood a macer, in black gown and cap, bearing his massive club of office; and on the front edge of the platform, looking down upon the audience, stood two janitors, dressed in the same manner, but with black plumes nodding in their caps. After a strain of music, a young man, sitting on a front bench on the right side of the platform, and dressed in the costume of a doctor of philosophy, turned his face to the presiding officer, and began to speak. 'It is Emilio Castelar,' said my Spanish friend: 'he is one of the professors of philosophy, *gran democrata, y muy elocuente.* He is not more than twenty-four years old, and yet he is a great advocate.' I observed the young man more narrowly: he had a round, youthful face, jet-black mustaches, and a bold forehead: he gesticulated with Spanish vivacity in yellow kid gloves. I was not near enough to hear very well what he said: but his discourse, delivered in earnest, impressive tones, seemed to take a strong hold of the audience, for

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they leaned forward with deep attention; and at the pauses I could hear the murmur of '*Muy bien! muy bien dicho!*'"[1]

Leaving Madrid about the middle of November, he passed leisurely through the valley of the Manzanares, the well-wooded districts of Aranjuez, the dreary wastes of La Mancha, and Murcia, the land of fruits, most of the way in a rude cart drawn by a tandem team, but often walking for miles through the thick mud of a Spanish autumn, — a form of exercise in which the ladies of the party also shared. At the ancient and decayed town of Alicante he left his family to take the steamer to Cartagena, and proceeded alone to that city. After spending some days in reading the old Roman inscriptions and inspecting the remains of Moorish architecture with which the place abounds, he rejoined his family on the arrival of the steamer, and embarked for Malaga.

Early in December the party paid a visit to Grenada, the former seat of Moorish power and magnificence. Although Bryant modestly declares, that, after what Irving has written of it, he would as soon think of attempting a poem on the wrath of Achilles, in competition with Homer, as of describing the Alhambra, the following passage of description has hardly been surpassed even by that charming writer: —

"If in any respect the Alhambra did not correspond with

[1] Letters from Spain, pp. 139, 140.

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the idea I had previously formed of it, it was in the minuteness of its ornamentation. I did not expect that the figures into which the surface of its walls is wrought, and which yet, in most places, preserve the sharp outline of a stereotype-plate, would prove to be no larger than some engravings in which they are represented. Yet this very minuteness, I must admit, harmonizes perfectly with the general character of the architecture, which is that of the utmost lightness and delicacy possible in buildings of stone. The architecture of the Alhambra is that of the harem: it is the architecture of a race who delighted in voluptuous ease; who wrapped themselves in soft apparel, and lolled upon divans. The Alhambra was the summer palace of the Moorish monarchs; a place of luxurious retreat from the relaxing heats of the season; a place of shade and running waters; courting the entrance of the winds under its arches and between its slender pillars, yet spreading a screen against the sunshine. To this end the stones of the quarry were shaped into a bower, with columns as light as the stems of the orange-trees planted in its courts, and walls incrusted with scroll-work and foliage as delicate as the leaves of the myrtle growing by its fountains. Yet the most remarkable parts of the Alhambra are those lofty rooms with circular vaults from which hang innumerable little points like icicles, with rounded recesses between them. These are as strangely beautiful as a dream, and translate into a visible reality the poetic idea of a sparry cavern formed by genii in the chambers of the rock."[1]

The garden of the Moorish kings was no longer open to visitors; but a letter to the governor of the Alhambra, which Bryant had received at Madrid, procured admission for his party. An-

[1] Letters from Spain, p. 205.

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other letter, from Archbishop Hughes, obtained access to the relics of Ferdinand and Isabella in the royal chapel of the cathedral. As they stood before the grand mausoleum of the sovereigns on which the royal effigies lie crowned and sceptred, "Do you perceive," said one of the party, "that the head of Ferdinand makes scarcely any impression on his pillow, while the head of Isabella sinks deep into hers? The artist, no doubt, intended to signify that the queen's head was much better furnished than that of her consort."

After spending a few days in Grenada, the city of ugly streets and beautiful women, the party returned to Malaga. A visit to Cadiz and Seville was intended, but finally given up; and they embarked in a steamer for Marseilles by way of Oran and Algiers about the middle of December. A brief visit to the African coast sufficed to show them enough of its mixed population, and in a few days they landed at Marseilles.

The following winter (1858) was passed in Italy, chiefly in the vicinity of Naples. Bryant's residence in Naples was marked by two memorable events, — his baptism, and his wife's recovery from a serious illness.

Trained in the doctrines of the Congregational Church of New England, he had always manifested a regard for divine revelation, and all parts of his

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life had been conformed to the most rigid principles of morality. After his removal to New York, he had attended a Unitarian church under the ministry of the Rev. William Ware, known in literature by his "Letters from Palmyra." At Roslyn he had been in the habit of worshipping in the Presbyterian Church, and had manifested much interest in its prosperity. His religious emotions had frequently found expression in his poems, and especially in several hymns which he had written at the request of friends: yet he had never made a public profession of religion. During his visit at Naples he met a former acquaintance,—the Rev. R. C. Waterston, a Unitarian minister of Boston, who, with his family, was temporarily living in Italy. They were frequently thrown together in their rambles; and one day, while walking along the shore of the Bay of Naples, the poet opened his heart to his friend, spoke of the sweetness of religion to him, and proposed that he be baptized. That evening, in the presence of seven, in an upper room in Naples, with prayer and hymns, at the age of sixty-four, the poet submitted to the rite of consecration, and in apostolic retirement partook of the holy communion.

How sincere his acceptance of religion was, the modesty of this profession, and the record of his life, sufficiently demonstrate. Twenty years later, when his friends gathered for the last time about

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his remains, his pastor, the Rev. Dr. Bellows of All Souls' Church, paid this tribute to the purity of his life: —

"I must reserve the few moments still left me to bear the testimony, which no one has a better right to offer, to Mr. Bryant's strictly religious character. A devoted lover of religious liberty, he was an equal lover of religion itself, — not in any precise dogmatic form, but in its righteousness, reverence, and charity. What his theology was you may safely infer from his regular and long attendance in this place of Christian worship. Still he was not a dogmatist, but preferred practical piety and working virtue to all modes of faith. What was obvious in him for twenty years past was an increasing respect and devotion to religious institutions, and a more decided Christian quality in his faith. I think he had never been a communicant in any church until he joined ours, fifteen years ago. From that time, nobody so regular in his attendance on public worship, in wet and dry, cold and heat, morning and evening, until the very last month of his life. The increasing sweetness and beneficence of his character, meanwhile, must have struck his familiar friends. His last years were his devoutest and most humane years. He became beneficent as he grew able to be so; and his hand was open to all just need, and to many unreasonable claimants.

"The first half or even two-thirds of his life had been a hard struggle with fortune; and he had acquired saving habits, thanks chiefly to the prudence of his honored and ever-lamented wife. But the moment he became successful, and acquired the means of beneficence, he practised it bountifully, indeed, perhaps often credulously; for he was simple-hearted and unsuspecting, easily misled by women's tears and entreaties, and not always with the fortitude to say 'No'

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when only his own money was at stake. Indeed, he had few defensive weapons either against intrusion or supplication, and could with difficulty withstand the approaches of those that fawned upon him, or those that asked his countenance for selfish purposes. Perhaps he understood their weaknesses; but he had not the heart to medicine them with brave refusal.

. . . . . .

"I shall have spoken in vain if I have not left upon your hearts the image of an upright, sincere, humane, and simple yet venerable manhood, — a life full of outward honors and inward worth. When I consider that I have been speaking of one whose fame fills the world, I feel how vain is public report compared with the honor of God and the gratitude and love of humanity. It is the private character of this unaffected Christian man that it most concerns us to consider and to imitate. He was great as the world counts greatness: he was greater as God counts it."

Soon after his baptism, he suffered a severe trial in the protracted illness of his wife. He had taken rooms at the Vittoria Hotel, overlooking the beautiful Bay of Naples. "The grand peninsula of Posilipo, studded with stately country-seats, and overhanging the sea with its tall gray precipices, bounds the sight to the west; to the east you have a view of Castellamare and Sorrento, with their background of airy mountain-summits; in front rises the rocky Isle of Capri; and close at hand the waters of the Mediterranean dash and murmur all day and all night on the shingly beach in front of the houses. The glorious

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prospects, the broad open streets full of Neapolitan bustle, and the warm winter sunshine, allure travellers to fix themselves in this part of Naples in preference to any other. Yet this beautiful quarter has a bad reputation for health among the Neapolitans." In this deceptive atmosphere Mrs. Bryant contracted a nervous fever which threatened her life. After her removal from the shore to the higher ground among the gardens, she began gradually to improve; but the poet long walked in the valley of the shadow of death. Her final restoration to health was celebrated in a song of gladness and triumph, dated at Castellamare, May, 1858, under the title "The Life That Is:"—

"Thou who so long hast pressed the couch of pain,
Oh, welcome, welcome back to life's free breath,—
To life's free breath and day's sweet light again,
From the chill shadows of the gate of death!

For thou hadst reached the twilight found between
The world of spirits and this grosser sphere:
Dimly by thee the things of earth were seen,
And faintly fell earth's voices on thine ear.

And now how gladly we behold, at last,
The wonted smile returning to thy brow!
The very wind's low whisper, breathing past
In the light leaves, is music to thee now.

. . . . . .

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Twice wert thou given me: once in thy fair prime,
Fresh from the fields of youth, when first we met,
And all the blossoms of that hopeful time
Clustered and glowed where'er thy steps were set.

And now, in thy ripe autumn, once again
Given back to fervent prayers and yearnings strong,
From the drear realm of sickness and of pain,
Where we had watched and feared and trembled long.

Now may we keep thee from the balmy air
And radiant walks of heaven a little space,
Where He who went before thee to prepare
For his meek followers shall assign thy place."

Early in the summer Bryant and his family passed through the cities of Northern Italy to England, and in August returned to their home at Roslyn, after an absence of more than a year. The letters written to "The Post" during this period were collected in a volume, and published in the following year under the title of "Letters from Spain and Other Countries."

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CHAPTER X.

A PATRIARCH IN LETTERS.

1858-1878.

"I am gazing into the twilight,
Where the dim-seen meadows lie;
And the wind of night is swaying
The trees with a heavy sigh."

WHEN sixty years have been passed in professional pursuits, and in rambling about the world, life has little left but repetition. Our boy-poet has become a venerable man, with silvered hair and beard. A celebrity in literature for forty years, a well-known journalist for almost a quarter of a century, a traveller in every division of the globe, Bryant at sixty-four was recognized by his countrymen as a patriarch in letters. Hence we have grouped in this chapter the remaining events of the poet's life, though covering a period of twenty years.

Soon after his return from his journey in Europe, he was called upon to deliver an address at a festival in honor of the poet Schiller, paying a

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glowing tribute to the genius and character of his brother bard, of whose works he was a faithful student and a warm admirer. Not long afterward he delivered a commemorative oration on Washington Irving, — a noble review of a beautiful and beneficent life. Bryant was particularly fitted, and frequently chosen, for this kind of public service. Some years later, he pronounced orations of a similar character in memory of his friends Fitz-Greene Halleck and Gulian C. Verplanck. His manner on these occasions was modest almost to manifest diffidence; his delivery clear, but undemonstrative. He was peculiarly averse to personal notoriety, — not only never seeking it, but even striving strenuously to avoid it. His appearance on the platform was in compliance with a sense of duty, and a regard for the wishes of others; and he was glad when his part was performed, that he might retire from the notice of men to the society of home and friends. We are assured by an editorial associate that "the impassive exterior, which misled many observers to believe the heart beneath it cold, was only the result of an unconquerable diffidence."

Though often urged to accept public positions of honor and of trust, he was neither an office-seeker nor an office-holder. In his early life at Great Barrington, he was a justice of the peace and town-clerk; but, in the years when the public

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eye turned toward him as a suitable occupant of high positions, he could not be prevailed upon to fill them. In 1860, however, he allowed himself to be made a Presidential elector, and voted for Abraham Lincoln. Afterwards, when his name was mentioned by President Lincoln for desirable foreign missions, he would not consent to have his nomination placed before the Senate. He was content to exercise the common rights of an American citizen, and quietly presented his ballot at the polls beside the humblest of his employees.

In 1864 the Century Club, of which the poet was one of the founders, celebrated his seventieth birthday with a festival, at which the Hon. George Bancroft presided. In reply to Mr. Bancroft's speech, the venerable bard made an address, which, for mingled beauty, pathos, and humor, was one of the happiest of his life: —

"I am congratulated [he said] on having completed my seventieth year. Is there nothing ambiguous, Mr. President, in such a compliment? — to be congratulated on having reached that stage of life when the bodily and mental powers pass into decline and decay! Lear is made by Shakespeare to say,

'Age is unnecessary.'

And a later poet, Dr. Johnson, expressed the same idea in one of his sonorous lines, —

'Superfluous lags the veteran on the stage.'

You have not forgotten, Mr. President, the old Greek saying, —

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> 'Whom the gods love die young;'

nor the passage in Shakespeare, —

> 'O sir! the good die first,
> And they whose hearts are dry as summer dust
> Burn to the socket.'"

In the same playful strain he continues: —

"What a world would this be if it were made up of old men! — generation succeeding to generation, of hoary ancients who had but half a dozen years, or perhaps half that time, to live! What new work would be attempted? what existing abuse or evil corrected? What strange subjects would such a world afford for the pencils of our artists! — groups of superannuated graybeards basking in the sun through the long days of spring, or huddling like sheep in warm corners in the winter-time; houses with the timbers dropping apart; cities in ruins; roads unwrought and impassable; weedy gardens, and fields with the surface feebly scratched to put in a scanty harvest; feeble old men climbing into crazy wagons, perhaps to be run away with, or mounting horses, if they mounted them at all, in terror of being hurled from their backs like a stone from a sling. Well it is that in this world of ours the old men are but a very small minority." [1]

With a light play of fancy he speaks of a transforming restorative, and the festival of joy over youth regained, instantly to banish the "vain dream;" "since it is only by passing through the dark valley of the shadow of death that man can reach his second youth."

In the year 1864 Bryant completed his im-

[1] Orations and Addresses, pp. 305, 306.

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provements on the homestead at Cummington, which he had previously purchased, and enlarged to an estate of about four hundred acres. The house in which he was born had been replaced by a different structure; and this was repaired and remodelled to suit the taste of its last owner, making it as it now stands, — a spacious and rambling mansion of two stories and a half, with a curb-roof, antique dormer-windows, and broad porches curtained with clambering vines, and surrounded with a smooth-shaven lawn. Here the poet kept part of his library, and had a pleasant study; and here, in the latter years of his life, he spent the autumn among the variegated foliage of the forest-trees and the golden fruitage of his orchards. Here he founded a public library for the use of his rural neighbors, and built a substantial school-house for the education of their children. These benefactions were made without the slightest ostentation, and from the purest regard for the happiness and improvement of those around him. The entire community paid him the tribute of respect and affection, and, when he died, mourned for him as for a beloved father.

A similar interest in the people of Roslyn, and a similar regard on their part, marked his residence at his favorite summer home. Here he built a beautiful hall for public uses. "When, at his request," says the Rev. Dr. Bellows, "I went to dedi-

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cate it, and at a proper moment asked, 'What shall we call this building?' the audience shouted, 'Bryant Hall!'—'No,' said the modest benefactor; 'let it be known and called simply "The Hall:"' and 'The Hall' it was baptized."

In the summer of 1866 the great shadow of Bryant's life fell upon him. His devoted wife, whose benign presence had for forty-five years illumined his home, whose prudence had laid the foundation of his fortune, whose piety had filled him with spiritual aspirations, whose companionship had cheered him in foreign lands, was called to "the radiant walks of heaven." The bereaved poet could not think of her as absent; and when the calm, sweet sunshine of October fell upon the grassy mound where she was laid beneath the flowers of June, he wrote,—

"May we not think that near us thou dost stand
With loving ministrations? for we know
Thy heart was never happy when thy hand
Was forced its tasks of mercy to forego.

Mayst thou not prompt with every coming day
The generous aim and act, and gently win
Our restless, wandering thoughts to turn away
From every treacherous path that ends in sin?"

But the bright illusion could not satisfy his longing. A better faith drew his thoughts and desires to a higher sphere; and a little later he

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wrote the sweet sad verses, in the poem called "A Lifetime," —

"And well I know that a brightness
From his life has passed away,
And a smile from the green earth's beauty,
And a glory from the day.

But I behold above him,
In the far blue depths of air,
Dim battlements shining faintly,
And a throng of faces there;

See over crystal barrier
The airy figures bend
Like those who are watching and waiting
The coming of a friend.

And one there is among them,
With a star upon her brow,
In her life a lovely woman,
A sinless seraph now.

I know the sweet calm features,
The peerless smile I know;
And I stretch my arms with transport
From where I stand below.

And the quick tears drown my eyelids;
But the airy figures fade,
And the shining battlements darken,
And blend with the evening shade.

I am gazing into the twilight,
Where the dim-seen meadows lie;
And the wind of night is swaying
The trees with a heavy sigh."

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Though crushed in spirit by the heavy blow, the venerable man indulged in no bitter misanthropy or childish lamentations. With a brave and resolute heart he strove to live the strong, manly life that he has held up to the world as an ideal in the last paragraph of "Thanatopsis," —

"Sustained and soothed by an unfaltering trust."

The following year he once more crossed the Atlantic, but found more satisfaction in quiet work at home. In 1863 he had published in his "Thirty Poems" a blank-verse translation of the Fifth Book of Homer's "Odyssey." It had been suggested by the "very great defects" of Cowper's translation, which, he thought, had failed to reproduce in English the simple style, the fire, and the rapid movement, of the original. His attempt in translating the Fifth Book of "The Odyssey" had been to present a true copy of the original in idiomatic English, — a result not previously attained by any translator of Homer. As labor was now a consolation to him, he devoted himself with vigor to the translation of "The Iliad;" which, however, he had begun in the previous year. His regular daily task was forty lines; but, when the spirit of the ancient bard most fully possessed him, he often closed the day with eighty. Like other great writers, he was not wholly the master of his inspiration; though the habits of journalism train

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one to a daily capacity of production. When asked by a friend if he could force himself to poetical composition at all times, his simple answer was, "Certainly not."

In addition to his daily task of translating, he was constantly contributing to the editorial columns of "The Post," and engaging in other literary labors. Among these are his introductions to publications upon which his work was mainly supervisory, rather than constructive; such as "The Library of Poetry and Song," "Picturesque America," and "The Popular History of the United States." As the sale of these works was greatly increased by the popular impression that they were his own productions, he has been severely criticised for allowing his good name to be sold either for his own or for other's men's profit. If the public announcement of any of these works savored of deception, he, at least, honestly performed that kind of labor which the titlepages promised, thus exempting himself from public censure. There was, too, a fitness in his attempting the supervision of works on subjects with which he was so familiar.

To the end of his life he was appealed to as a critic by persons who had no acquaintance with him, or any right to expect his attention, pressed as he was with his own cares. An editorial associate gives the following account of this kind of

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annoyance, and of the way in which the poet was affected by it:—

"There is a large class of hopeless versifiers who have been in the habit of sending their poetic wares to Mr. Bryant, and asking his judgment upon them; and between his tender conscience, which would not permit him to trifle with the truth, and his keen reluctance to give pain, he was sometimes sorely perplexed. These things imposed upon him, too, an amount of labor for others which was an unfair burden; and on one occasion he came into my room with a parcel of letters and papers in his hand, and in a tone of dejection asked me, 'Do people send you their manuscripts to read in this way?' I replied that a good many of them did, and showed him the manuscript of a novel or an epic poem which a Pennsylvanian youth had modestly requested me to revise for the press.

"'What do you write to them?' he asked. Then he sat down, and told me how sorely he suffered from the perplexity already mentioned; and I ventured to suggest that a letter of even seeming commendation from him to an ambitious incapable might spoil a good blacksmith, and make a ridicuously poor poet; that perhaps a good many of his correspondents sought his approval in this way as a bolster to their vanity; and that the greatest kindness, in very many cases, that he could do to his correspondents, would be frankly to tell them that they could not write poetry. He admitted the correctness of this view with something like a shudder; and the matter ended by his acceptance of my suggestion, that he should refer the letters and poems of his unknown correspondents to the staff for examination, and that we should report directly to the writers.

"They continued to task him in this way, however, to the end. On the morning of that sad day on which he met

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with his mishap, he came into my room with a pair of poems sent to him by a person whom he knew, and asked me to read them. I did so, and found them to be extremely poor stuff.

"'I supposed so,' he said; 'and now I suppose I shall have to write to her on the subject. People expect too much of me, — altogether too much.'" [1]

Some of his principles of style are set forth in the following extract from a letter once sent to a young applicant for his opinions and advice: —

"My young friend, I observe that you have used several French expressions in your letter. I think, if you will study the English language, that you will find it capable of expressing all the ideas that you may have. I have always found it so; and in all that I have written I do not recall an instance where I was tempted to use a foreign word, but that, on searching, I have found a better one in my own language.

"Be simple, unaffected; be honest in your speaking and writing. Never use a long word when a short one will do as well.

"Call a spade by its name, not a well-known oblong instrument of manual labor; let a home be a home, and not a residence; a place, not a locality; and so on of the rest. When a short word will do, you will always lose by a long one; you lose in clearness; you lose in honest expression of meaning; and, in the estimation of all men who are capable of judging, you lose in reputation for ability.

"The only true way to shine, even in this false world, is to be modest and unassuming. Falsehood may be a thick crust; but, in the course of time, truth will find a place to

[1] Memorial Pamphlet, pp. 68, 69.

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break through. Elegance of language may not be in the power of us all; but simplicity and straightforwardness are."[1]

In December, 1869, he finished the translation of "The Iliad," after five years' labor; and the following year it was published in Boston by J. R. Osgood & Co. It met with a hearty welcome, not only from the lovers of the Greek epics, but from English readers, who felt for the first time that Homer's spirit could be caught in their mother-tongue.

In one of the most scholarly reviews ever written in this country, Mr. Charlton T. Lewis passes the following judgment upon the work: "There is no other English 'Iliad' which could be made by corrections to represent Homer, on the whole, as well as Mr. Bryant's represents him now; and until that distant day, when a poet no less eminent than he shall, with fuller knowledge and before a world of richer intelligence, be content to give his maturest years of labor to the singing of these old songs again, Mr. Bryant's translation will assuredly be recognized wherever our mother-tongue is read, as its best echo of the old Greek epic."[2]

The success of "The Iliad" encouraged him to attempt the translation of its companion, "The

[1] Memorial Pamphlet, p. 23.
[2] North-American Review, April, 1871, p. 368.

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Odyssey;" and this was ready for publication in December, 1871, having occupied only two years. Pope took twelve years to produce his "pretty poem," as Bentley called it, which, after all, was not Homer, and "let out" a quarter of the work to the journeymen translators Fenton and Broome. Bryant did the work far better all alone, at the age of seventy, and in about half the time.

His vigor of mind had been preserved by a strict observance of the laws of health as regards diet, sleep, and exercise, — the tripod of physical well-being. In a letter to a friend he has given us a detailed account of his mode of life at this period: —

My dear Sir, — I promised some time since to give you some account of my habits of life, so far at least as regards diet, exercise, and occupations. I am not sure that it will be of any use to you, although the system which I have for many years observed seems to answer my purpose very well. I have reached a pretty advanced period of life without the usual infirmities of old age, and with my strength, activity, and bodily faculties generally in pretty good preservation. How far this may be the effect of my way of life, adopted long ago, and steadily adhered to, is perhaps uncertain.

I rise early, — at this time of the year, about half-past five; in summer, half an hour, or even an hour, earlier. Immediately, with very little encumbrance of clothing, I begin a series of exercises, for the most part designed to expand the chest, and, at the same time, call into action all the muscles and articulations of the body. These are per-

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formed with dumb-bells, the very lightest, covered with flannel, with a pole, a horizontal bar, and a light chair swung around my head. After a full hour, and sometimes more, passed in this manner, I bathe from head to foot. When at my place in the country I sometimes shorten my exercises in the chamber, and, going out, occupy myself for half an hour or more in some work which requires brisk exercise. After my bath, if breakfast be not ready, I sit down to my studies till I am called.

My breakfast is a simple one, — hominy and milk, or, in place of hominy, brown bread or oatmeal or wheaten grits, and, in the season, baked sweet apples. Buckwheat cakes I do not decline, nor any other article of vegetable food; but animal food I never take at breakfast. Tea and coffee I never touch at any time. Sometimes I take a cup of chocolate, which has no narcotic effect, and agrees with me very well. At breakfast I often take fruit, either in its natural state or freshly stewed.

After breakfast I occupy myself for a while with my studies; and then, when in town, I walk down to the office of "The Evening Post," nearly three miles distant, and after about three hours return, always walking, whatever be the weather or the state of the streets. In the country I am engaged in my literary tasks till a feeling of weariness drives me out into the open air; and I go upon my farm, or into the garden and prune the fruit-trees, or perform some other work about them which they need, and then go back to my books. I do not often drive out, preferring to walk.

In the country I dine early; and it is only at that meal that I take either meat or fish, and of these but a moderate quantity, making my dinner mostly of vegetables. At the meal which is called tea I take only a little bread and butter, with fruit if it be on the table. In town, where I dine later, I make but two meals a day. Fruit makes a

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considerable part of my diet, and I eat it at almost any hour of the day without inconvenience. My drink is water; yet I sometimes, though rarely, take a glass of wine. I am a natural temperance man, finding myself rather confused than exhilarated by wine. I never meddle with tobacco, except to quarrel with its use.

That I may rise early, I, of course, go to bed early, — in town, as early as ten; in the country, somewhat earlier.

For many years I have avoided in the evening every kind of literary occupation which tasks the faculties, such as composition, — even to the writing of letters, — for the reason that it excites the nervous system, and prevents sound sleep. My brother told me, not long since, that he had seen in a Chicago newspaper, and several other Western journals, a paragraph in which it was said that I am in the habit of taking quinine as a stimulant; that I have depended upon the excitement it produces in writing my verses; and that, in consequence of using it in that way, I had become as deaf as a post. As to my deafness, you know that to be false; and the rest of the story is equally so. I abominate all drugs and narcotics, and have always carefully avoided every thing which spurs nature to exertions which it would not otherwise make. Even with my food I do not take the usual condiments, such as pepper and the like.

I am, sir, truly yours,

W. C. BRYANT.

After the completion of "The Odyssey," Bryant travelled in the South, and spent the winter of 1871–72 in Mexico, where he wrote a series of letters to "The Post." On his return, much of his time was given to the revision of the manuscript for "The Popular History of the United States."

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His interest in public affairs was not altogether professional, but patriotic. His scorn of fraud, and hatred of corruption, were never concealed or appeased. His brief but stirring address on Reform, at the Cooper Institute, in the autumn of 1872, will never be forgotten by those who heard it. It seemed like the utterance of a Hebrew prophet, as the gray-headed speaker declared, in clear, firm tones, "The robbers are the few: the robbed are the many. If the many would only come to a mutual understanding, and act together, the robbers would never obtain public office, or, if by accident they obtained it, would be thrust out the first opportunity. In these matters, concert of action is every thing; and the rogues know it. As long as the opposition to their designs is divided into many little minorities, they laugh at it. High-handed villany takes its adversaries, one after another, by the throat, and strangles them by detail."

In 1874 the poet was made the recipient of the crowning honor of his life. At a meeting of his friends and admirers to fix upon a suitable plan for the commemoration of his eightieth birthday, it was suggested "that a silver vase of original design and choice workmanship, symbolizing in its sculpture the character of Mr. Bryant's life and writings, should be procured by a popular subscription, to be ultimately placed in the Metropoli-

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tan Museum of Art." A committee, consisting of many of the most celebrated literary, professional, and business men of New York and other cities, was appointed to execute the proposition. On the afternoon of the 3d of November, many friends appeared at the poet's residence in Sixteenth Street, when the following address, prepared by the Rev. Dr. Samuel Osgood, and signed by many distinguished names, was presented, after some introductory remarks by Mr. Jonathan Sturges: —

Nov. 3, 1874.

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

Honored and Dear Sir, — We, your friends and fellow-citizens, congratulate you upon completing your eightieth year in such vigor of body and mind. We give you our heartiest wishes for your continued health and happiness; and we inform you respectfully of the intention to embody in a commemorative vase, of original design and choice workmanship, the lessons of your literary and civic career in its relations with our country, whose nature, history, liberty, law, and conscience you have so illustrated. We believe that such a work will be an expressive fact of our coming National Centennial, and a permanent treasure of our Metropolitan Museum of Art. We only add, that we desire that this tribute of gratitude should come from your friends throughout the country, without distinction of party or section; and that our American women shall be encouraged to unite in the act, since our mothers, wives, and daughters are ready to declare their obligation to you for the pure language and sentiment which you have given to the homes and schools of the nation.

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The universal character of this testimonial is shown by the fact that it was signed by men of every shade of religious and political opinion, including authors, statesmen, generals, tradesmen, artists, clergymen, editors, and lawyers, representing every part of the United States.

The design of the vase adopted by the committee was made by Mr. James H. Whitehouse, of the firm of Tiffany & Co. "When the Bryant testimonial was first mentioned to me," says that gentleman, "my thoughts at once flew to the country, — to the crossing of the boughs of trees, to the plants and flowers, and to a general contemplation of Nature; and these, together with a certain Homeric influence, produced in my mind the germ of the design, — the form of a Greek vase, with the most beautiful American flowers growing round and intwining themselves gracefully about it, each breathing its own particular story as it grew."

Nearly two years was required to complete the vase; and it was not ready for presentation until June 20, 1876. It is of the finest *repoussé* work, representing more than a thousand days of patient and ingenious labor, and costing five thousand dollars. The Greek severity and the Gothic lines of interlacing branches pointing upward signify "the union of the Greek culture with the Hebrew faith, — the culture that delights in nature and

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humanity, and the faith that never forgets the God over all, never loses the First Great Cause in pantheist visions or humanitarian pride." But the symbolism is far more explicit than this. The vase is completely covered with significant figures. On one side there is a medallion with the poet's head, and on the reverse another medallion with two female figures, — Poetry contemplating Nature. Some of the representations have an historic meaning. In one the poet is learning the art of verse from his father, who points to Homer as his master. In another the boy-poet is musing in a grove, as if dwelling upon the images of "Thanatopsis." In a third the most primitive form of the printing-press represents the labors of the journalist. In a fourth he is the translator of "The Iliad" and "The Odyssey." In another medallion is an open book, nameless, but evidently designed to turn our thoughts toward the Book of books, from which the poet drew the precepts of his life. The waterfowl and the fringed gentian are among the ornaments; while the ivy represents age; the amaranth, immortality; the eglantine, the spirit of poetry; the water-lily, eloquence; the bobolink, humorous verse; the broken shackles, the poet's work in the abolition of slavery; the Indian-corn and cotton, his interest in industrial enterprises.

The presentation was made with appropriate

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ceremonies in Chickering Hall, in the presence of a large audience consisting of the most cultivated men and women of the city. The Rev. Dr. Samuel Osgood concluded the speech of presentation in the following language: —

"Many offerings, great and small, are in this piece of silver; and they come from all parts of the country, not without complaint that more was not called for. We who live in and around New York have not been behindhand in this tribute, and we enter into this presentation with peculiar earnestness. You are our neighbor and companion; and for more than fifty years you have taken interest in the welfare of this city, and helped us in every way. We can all join in this deference, whether native or foreign-born, Knickerbockers or New-Englanders, Eastern, Western, Northern, or Southern; for we all know you and respect you. You have helped turn out the knaves, and put honest men into power. You stood by the old flag in the great struggle when 'God and our Country' was the motto; and you are standing by it now, when 'honest men and honest money' is the issue of the time. You have not lost ground by living with us; and you have risen from a young man of thirty to a full-grown man — I will not say an old man — of over eighty, as hearty and active as ever. You have seen the city double its numbers and wealth many times, not without some signs of growth in wisdom as well as bulk. We have been in some respects a little more fast than your advice and example taught us; but in being generally cheerful we have followed your lead, and kept up a brave heart through all changes of fortune. We are glad to have you with us to cheer us on to the great future as we turn the leaf of a new century. You still live the life which this vase embodies; you still see and enjoy the charm of Nature; the gentian,

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the violet, the primrose, and the apple-blossom delight you as ever; you hear the hymn of the forest and the song of the stars; the merry Robert of Lincoln sings for you his genial glee, and the solemn water-fowl preaches with untiring wing. Your Muse, that began with 'Thanatopsis,' promises to make 'Athanasia' her swan-song as the lengthening shadows point toward morning. Accept this gift, with all its sculptures and memorials, the study of many thoughtful hours, and the trophy of more than a thousand days' work, all throbbing with heart-beats, as at once our record and our blessing. This exquisite form brings beauty from the land of old Homer to join with truth and grace from our new America in celebrating your birthday. It means more than we can say. But we can say, for our country and for ourselves, that it means, 'God bless you, Mr. Bryant!'

The modest response displays so much of character, that it deserves a place here, and in the memory of every student of the venerable poet's life and mind: —

"I shall begin what I have to say with thanks, and with thanks I shall end it, — thanks to my excellent friends who have concurred in the presentation of this beautiful vase, thanks to the artists by whom it is designed and executed, thanks to my friend the chairman of the committee for the obliging expressions with which he has accompanied the presentation, and thanks to this fair audience for the encouragement of their presence. After expressing my acknowledgments for the honor done me, it would be easiest for me to take refuge in silence; but this would hardly become me after the kind words addressed to me, and the superb gift offered to my acceptance. I fear that I might

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be accused of imitating an example of which I remember to have read some forty years since. A volunteer military company in a provincial town of England on a time presented their captain with a silver pitcher. The non-commissioned officer who presented it, approaching his commander, held it out to him, and said, 'Captain, here's the jug.' To this the captain replied, 'Ay, is that the jug?' And there the speech-making ended, and the company were ready for the festivities of the evening. I am afraid that a similar condensation of what I have to say might be as ridiculous.

"Mr. Chairman of the Committee, and you my good friends who have done me the honor to be here, I would not have you understand that I have the great presumption to take the obliging things said of me as my due, or this superb gift before me as earned by any service which I have rendered in any quarter. I wish I deserved it all; but, knowing better in my heart, I put a large balance — a very large one — to the credit of your generosity. What merit would be yours if I had fairly earned all that you are bestowing upon me? You would be simply doing your duty; you would be paying a debt. I should have no thanks to give, and you no honor for your benefaction. But consider it in the other light: suppose that I receive these testimonials of your kindness without having earned them; and this proceeding becomes an act of munificence, noble, princely, imperial, — a munificence deserving to be extolled in the choicest phrases which language can supply, inasmuch as it is like the bounty which showers the genial rain and pours the sweet sunshine on the unjust as well as the just, and under the influence of benignant seasons ripens the harvests of the field for Tweed as well as for Dr. Muhlenberg.

"And now a word concerning the superb vase which is before me, — the work of artists who are the worthy

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successors of Benvenuto Cellini, and eminent in their department. It has been greatly admired by those who have seen it, and deserves their admiration. I remember to have read, I think, some half-century ago, a definition of the term 'genius,' making it to consist in the faculty of accomplishing great results by small means; the power, in short, which an individual has of overcoming difficulties by a forecast and vigor not possessed by others, converting obstacles into instruments of success. This vase I may call a product of genius, both in the design and the execution; for who would suppose that any skill of the artist could connect with such a subject as he had before him images so happily conceived, so full of expression, and so well combining expression with grace? My friends, we authors cultivate a short-lived reputation; one generation of us pushes another from the stage; the very language in which we write becomes a jargon, and we cease to be read: but a work like this is always beautiful, always admired. Age has no power over its charm. Hereafter some one may say, 'This beautiful vase was made in honor of a certain American poet, whose name it bears, but whose writings are forgotten. It is remarkable that so much pains should have been taken to illustrate the life and writings of one whose works are so completely unknown at the present day.' Thus, gentlemen artists, I shall be indebted to you for causing the memory of my name to outlast that of my writings."

The vase was exposed to the view of the public at the Centennial Exhibition, where it was seen with approving eyes by thousands of the poet's countrymen, — a conspicuous object of attraction amid the products of genius by which it was surrounded.

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To the end of life Bryant was not only a producer, but a reader, of literature. He had so long breathed the atmosphere of the noblest poetry, that his opinions of contemporary productions had the force of an oracle with those who were so fortunate as to hear them. His measure of literary value was not the amount of expressive power displayed by a writer regardless of substantive or ethical considerations. Nothing was beautiful to him which was not both true and good. While he thought that Rossetti wrote very finely, he condemned his poems as falling below the proper standard of morality. His sensuous tone, he complained, often fell to the level of sensuality. Some of his verses he regarded as unintelligible, and he held that even a poet was bound to write so as to be understood. He found fault with Robert Browning because of his obscurity; but to him this was not so bad as indecency. Swinburne he detested, though he admitted that he had been prevented from being familiar with his poems on account of their disregard of ethical laws. He was a warm admirer of William Morris, like himself a lover of Nature, and praised both his art and his morals. He had a high opinion of Mrs. Browning's powers, but regretted that she had closed her career with political poems, careless and hasty in execution, and altogether unworthy of her genius. There are two works which the world

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would have been happy to receive from Bryant's hands, — an account of his personal interviews with distinguished contemporaries, and his opinions of literary works. In his published writings he has singularly avoided giving expressions to personal matters, though he sometimes spoke of them in private. "His conversation," says an editorial associate, referring to one of his latest interviews with him, "was a critical history of American literature in miniature; and some of the opinions expressed would shock that class of critics whose admiration of any thing American is tempered by a truly Nazarene conviction of the unworthiness of Nazareth."

His mind was well stored with detailed knowledge of every kind, and was a perfect treasury of choice selections from a wide range of poetry. His verbal memory was excellent; and he could recite long passages from all his favorite poets, not only in English, but also in foreign languages. Mr. John C. Zachos, the curator of the Cooper Institute, relates a story illustrative of his knowledge of poetry, and his enthusiasm in reciting it when fired with its spirit.

Not long before his death, Bryant was present at a social gathering of literary men at the house of Peter Cooper, when the conversation fell upon the capacity of various languages to express the sense by the sound. Mr. Zachos advocated the

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sonorous qualities of the modern Greek, while Bryant thought that the Italian possessed more illustrative power than any other language. In order to test the comparative merits of the two languages, he proposed, that, if Mr. Zachos would recite something in modern Greek, he would repeat a selection in Italian. The proposition was at once carried out; and Bryant chose a passage from Dante, and recited it "with a power and enthusiasm and fire which surprised his audience." "It was a fine sight, and one to be remembered," said Mr. Zachos: "the white-haired old man, wrapt up in the beauty of what he was reciting, and almost oblivious of his surroundings, made the scene an impressive one. Aside from the beauty of the sight, it was a marvellous instance of the influence which the genius of song of any nationality had over the aged poet, enabling him to overcome for the time his habitual serenity." [1]

When, on the 29th of May, 1878, the bust of Mazzini, the Italian statesman, was to be unveiled in the Central Park, it was fitting that Bryant, who, seven years before, had spoken in celebration of the accomplishment of Italian unity, should be invited to deliver one of the addresses on this occasion. He was conveyed to the park in his carriage early in the afternoon, and delivered his speech beneath the warm rays of a bright May

[1] The Evening Post, June 19, 1878.

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sun. Toward the close of his address he advanced uncovered from the shelter of an umbrella which a friend had insisted upon holding over him, and pronounced the peroration with the bright sunshine falling directly upon his unprotected head. At the conclusion of the discourse he showed much exhaustion, but did not complain of fatigue. Accepting the invitation of General James G. Wilson to rest for a little while at the latter's house in Seventy-fourth Street, and take some refreshment there before proceeding down town to his own home, he walked with General Wilson and the general's little daughter to his house, engaging in pleasant conversation with the little girl on the way. When they reached the entrance of the house, General Wilson advanced to open the inner door, leaving his guest for a moment on the steps. An instant later he turned, to see the aged poet lying partly in the vestibule, with his head upon the platform-step. Assistance was offered by a passing stranger; and the insensible form was carried into the parlor, and placed upon a sofa. When Mrs. Wilson bathed his head with ice-water, he murmured, "Don't!" but remained unconscious for some time. A glass of iced sherry revived him; and he touched his head, moaning, "My head! my head! I don't feel well." He declined being put to bed, and at his request he was taken home. During the ride to his house in Six-

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teenth Street he conversed, but in a wandering manner. When they arrived at his home he seemed to have forgotten the street and the house; but, upon a little delay in the response to General Wilson's ring, he mechanically took out his latch-key, and opened the door. When they were in the house he looked dreamily at General Wilson, and asked if he wished to see Miss Fairchild. The general replied that he did; and Bryant directed a servant, who had appeared, to call his niece. A word explained the situation. The poet was put to bed, and his physician called. In a few hours he became unconscious. Hardly a word passed his lips, except a few simple directions, during the remaining thirteen days of his life, though he occasionally rallied sufficiently to speak. In a short time paralysis of the right side supervened, and his life gradually ebbed away. At about half-past five o'clock, on the 12th of June, surrounded by his friends, his spirit peacefully left the sleeping body, and passed out into the unknown.

The press of the entire country had spoken his praises, and the pious of the land had prayed for his recovery, during the two weeks of his lingering; and, when at last the end was announced, it seemed like a national bereavement. Every respectable journal in the land reviewed the career of the departed poet; and in all the notices, written by men of every shade of religious and political

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opinion, there was no word of censure or disparagement.

On the 14th of June his remains were removed to All Souls' Church, where in life he had worshipped; and his pastor, the Rev. Dr. Bellows, pronounced a funeral oration in the presence of a densely crowded audience, in which were gathered the leading men and women of New York.

The services closed with one of the poet's own beautiful hymns, and the recitation of the Lord's Prayer by the entire congregation. A special train conveyed the body and a few friends to Roslyn, whence he was carried in a hearse to the cemetery, where a granite monument marked the resting-place of his wife. There, in the spot which he had often visited with flowers and tears for her he loved, amid the singing of birds and the swaying of green branches, while the golden sunlight of the radiant June poured its brightness over all, his pastor solemnly repeated some of the poet's own verses; the children of the neighborhood filled his grave with fragrant blossoms; and then they left him alone on the hillside in the silent companionship of Nature and his dead.

Thus was the wish uttered half a century before granted by Nature to her poet: —

"I gazed upon the glorious sky
And the green mountains round,
And thought, that, when I came to lie
At rest within the ground,

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'Twere pleasant, that in flowery June,
When brooks send up a cheerful tune,
And groves a joyous sound,
The sexton's hand, my grave to make,
The rich, green mountain-turf should break."

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CHAPTER XI.

THE JOURNALIST.

FEW professions demand a higher order of intellect or a wider diversity of talents than journalism. The editor is a dealer in the most perishable of all commodities, — items of intelligence which to-morrow become a common possession, or are deprived of all value by a contradiction. Whoever would earn his bread by the sale of news, therefore, must exercise the keenest vigilance, or his wares, though bought at a high price, become worthless in his hands. Yet, while alacrity is the most obviously essential of journalistic qualifications, it is by no means the rarest. Few readers, even among the more thoughtful, ever think of the encyclopedic scholarship, the ripeness of judgment, the acquaintance with the world, the knowledge of human nature, and the literary attainments, represented in a single number of a daily newspaper. Not only must the substance of the journal be solid and fresh, but it must at once

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suit the taste of the cultivated, meet the demands of the learned, avoid the cavils of the critical, and please the seeker after novelty. When it is remembered that a single copy of a newspaper like "The Evening Post" contains as much matter as a good-sized volume, the marvellous productiveness of the great novelists ceases to be a wonder in comparison with the fertility of our writers for the daily press. In an editor's work, moreover, there is little that is purely arbitrary. His arguments must be sound in themselves, and clearly stated; his opinions must be framed for a constituency, and yet possess an air of independence; his comments must be both timely, and above the average of popular reflection. In addition to the constant tax upon the resources of invention and style, there is the regulative element in the management of a journal, — the shaping of a policy under conditions which are constantly shifting, and which cannot generally be foreseen. Surely there is not a faculty of the human mind, or a complex co-operation of faculties, which journalism does not daily lay under tribute.

It is sometimes remarked that Bryant wrote little; and, if we have in mind only what he has published in books, this is true. If, however, we take into the account his editorial contributions during the fifty-two years of his connection with "The Post," he is one of the most voluminous

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writers that ever lived. At a moderate average, his editorials alone would fill more than a hundred duodecimo volumes of five hundred pages each, — a mass of literature that no American writer has exceeded. And, what is more important, most of these writings are fairly worthy of the name *literature*, whether we consider the topics, ranging through the whole realm of public questions for half a century; the originality of treatment, often disclosing the widest scholarship and the most profound reflection; or the style, always pure, clear, and forcible, and often chastely elegant. Behind this editor's desk there sat a master of many languages, a traveller in foreign lands, a student of various sciences, a poet of unquestioned genius, a moralist of high principles, a critic of keen penetration. The man in whom all these were united made it a special object of endeavor always to write the best thoughts in the best manner.

There are three classes of newspapers, or three schools of journalism, if one prefers so to mark the distinction. The first we may call the presentive. It lays before the public a chronicle of each day's events, a transcript of the world's doings for twenty-four hours. Religion, philosophy, science, politics, literature, crime, sport, adventure, accident, — all are recognized as having an interest for men, and all are represented. All parts of the

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world are brought within the field of the editorial telescope, and every observation is faithfully recorded. The city sportsman and the village pastor buy the paper, — the former to read of the last race, the latter to read of the proceedings of a religious convention. The day has been photographed: the editor feels that his responsibility is ended, and leaves his readers to the exercise of their personal tastes, regardless of results. The second may be termed dogmatic. It views the world through a glass of a definite color. Every event has a foregone significance. Some events are, of course, not to be noticed at all, since they militate against the preconceived views and avowed principles of the journal. Other events are to be exaggerated, belittled, or otherwise modified, so as to serve the ends of the party, the clique, or the man, that is in every way to be supported. A third deserves to be named the critical. It exists for the discovery and promulgation of truth, and the detection and suppression of error, on all the themes within its range. It has no alliances, except such as grow out of temporary coincidence of view. It has no pledged friends; for it depends upon no organization for its support. It advocates no man as infallible, because it reserves the right of measuring all men by their acts as they occur. Such a journal Bryant designed making "The Post" during the years of his editorial management.

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Several of its rivals surpassed it in freshness and fulness of news, in range of discussion, and in extent of circulation. His chief aim was not to make it pre-eminent in any of these respects, though these were not disregarded. His idea of a newspaper was that of a moral force, shaping and elevating the public mind which it enlightened and informed. In Bryant's view, the true mission of a newspaper is, not to supply information to-day which will be useless to-morrow, but rather to co-ordinate great events, and interpret their meaning for the benefit of society and the state.

Every journal, except a mere news-bulletin, must have certain principles which form its standard of judgment in the measurement of men and events. "The Post" was founded under Federalist auspices; but, when Bryant became its editor, it had gradually changed its attitude. The only condition of his acceptance of the editorial position, says his associate Mr. Bigelow, was "the privilege of advocating a removal of needless restrictions upon commerce, and a separation of government moneys from the banking capital of the country." He was one of the earliest and most vigorous advocates of free trade in this country, and, till the day of his death, continued to be a stout champion of unfettered commerce. When he began to advocate this doctrine, his was

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the only journal north of the Potomac that was not favorable to protection. He lived to see his sentiments espoused by a strong party in a section where they were once held in almost universal contempt. In recognition of his long and faithful services, the free-traders of New York gave a banquet in his honor in 1868. He was a vigorous defender of President Jackson's policy in opposition to the United-States Bank, and a leading advocate of the Sub-Treasury plan.

During his editorial career twelve presidential administrations passed under his review, and none escaped his criticism. His paper was nominally allied to the Democratic party, though always free from dependence upon its leaders, from the beginning of his management until 1856, when the attitude of President Pierce and his party on the subject of slavery alienated him from that connection, and he threw his influence with the Republicans in the effort to elect Fremont. From that time his sympathies were with the Republicans, as the leaders in a national policy that opposed disunion and the continuance of slavery. He stood with Lincoln during his entire career, and advocated the election of Grant in 1868. Although he criticised his administration severely, and especially his policy for reconstructing the Southern States, he again supported Grant in 1872, in preference to Horace Greeley, the leading

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champion of a theory in political economy which Bryant had combated all his life.

His own name was at this time mentioned for the presidency as a third candidate. His feelings in regard to this proposition are expressed in the following card to the public: —

Certain journals of this city have lately spoken of me as one ambitious of being nominated as a candidate for the presidency of the United States. The idea is absurd enough, not only on account of my advanced age, but of my unfitness in various respects for the labor of so eminent a post. I do not, however, object to the discussion of my deficiencies on any other ground than that it is altogether superfluous, since it is impossible that I should receive any formal nomination, and equally impossible, if it were offered, that I should commit the folly of accepting it.

WILLIAM C. BRYANT.

NEW YORK, July 8, 1872.

His attitude on the subject of slavery was for a time ambiguous. During the discussion of this momentous problem, he paid several visits to the Southern States; but there is in his letters no protest against the "great wrong" of human bondage. He describes Southern manners, paints pictures of Southern life, and refers to the condition of the slaves, without a criticism upon the institution against which the agitators of Boston were declaiming in tones of thunder. He seemed to them cold and heartless, as did also the majority of men at that time. But, as we view him now, his silence

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and statuesque impassiveness seem like those of Nemesis, mutely contemplating the atrocities of men before the falling of her avenging sword. No one knew better than Bryant the strength of a cause fortified behind traditional and constitutional intrenchments, and no one knew better than he the folly of a strife in which the material interests of a powerful people are arrayed on the one side against the mere fulminations of moralists on the other. He was content to plead for the restriction of slavery within its original limits, and for the freedom of discussion, believing that the economic interests of man, as well as his moral nature, would ultimately oppose, and expel without bloodshed, a system of enforced labor. He was willing to await the "appointed time;" but, when at length it came, he sang the dirge of Slavery in words that were gathering force during a long period of silence:—

"O thou great Wrong, that, through the slow-paced years,
Didst hold thy millions fettered, and didst wield
The scourge that drove the laborer to the field,
And turn a stony gaze on human tears!
Thy cruel reign is o'er:
Thy bondmen crouch no more
In terror at the menace of thine eye;
For He who marks the bounds of guilty power,
Long-suffering, hath heard the captive's cry,
And touched his shackles at the appointed hour,
And, lo! they fall, and he whose limbs they galled
Stands in his native manhood, disenthralled."

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It is probable that one of the checks upon Bryant's pen during the problematic period of the slavery question was a fear that an untimely revolution might dismember the nation. The unity of the nation was a precious thing in his sight, and never once did he fail to censure every tendency toward disruption. Free-trader as he was, when the nullification of a national law was proposed by the Southern believers in his economic theory he at once opposed their measure, and declared, "The moment that our government ceases to be supported by the force of opinion in any considerable portion of its territory, that moment it is at an end. It is a dangerous experiment that some politicians are making, — to discover the utmost limit of this force of opinion, and at what point it will cease to support the execution of the laws in a large part of the Union. It is worse. It is a flagitious experiment, a danger unnecessarily and wantonly incurred." This was in 1832. When, nearly thirty years later, secession threatened the dismemberment of the nation, he earnestly advocated the prosecution of the war for the restoration of the Union.

His advocacy of equal rights was not less vigorous than his zeal for a united country. Whenever a right seemed to be invaded, he was sure to appear as a champion for the one whom he thought to be wronged. When the smoke of battle had rolled

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away, and the soldiers of the General Government were still garrisoning the South, he maintained that "these practices, which contemplate the subjection of local politics to the federal authorities by the exercise of military power, must be stopped, must be broken up forever."

He was particularly fond of questions of finance, and had clear opinions upon every phase of monetary matters during the entire history of the country. He readily transferred to the nation the rules of business which apply to individuals; and maintained that integrity of purpose, and fidelity to pledges, are equally binding on states and persons, and as essential to the financial standing of the former as of the latter. Hence, when the necessity for its existence was removed, he strove to exchange an irredeemable paper currency for the money of the world, according to the spirit of the public promises when they were made in the hour of danger.

In the earlier years of his career as a journalist he wrote with an emphasis and fire that often brought him into controversy, and aroused the hostility of his political opponents. This was incident to the faithful discharge of his duty as a public critic; and, had he done otherwise, there would linger the suspicion that he was a mere trimmer. Yet, remembering these conflicts, and speaking of him as wearing the panoply of his

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profession, and crossing swords in the resounding arena, a fellow journalist who has long participated in the struggle, and often under a different banner, — George W. Curtis, — uses this language: "In all the long, tumultuous years of his editorial life, does any memory, however searching or censorious, recall one line that he wrote which was not honest and pure; one measure that he defended except from the profoundest conviction of its usefulness to the country; one cause that he advocated, which any friend of liberty, of humanity, of good government, would deplore? . . . It is the lesson of this editorial life, that public service the most resplendent, on sea or shore, in cabinet or congress, however great and beneficent, is not a truer service than that of the private citizen like Bryant, who for half a century, with conscience and knowledge, with power and unquailing courage, held the hand and heart of his country true to her own glorious ideal." [1]

In connection with his economic and political teaching, Bryant strove to make his paper an educational power among its readers by diffusing scientific and practical information, and by stimulating the public mind to the enjoyment of literature and art. The public health was ever dear to him, and he was interested in every sanitary improvement.

[1] Address before the New-York Historical Society.

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He had the advantage of able assistance in the conduct of the paper. The Hon. John Bigelow, whose name is known in literature and diplomacy, and Mr. Parke Godwin, who has been previously mentioned, brought to the aid of the editor-in-chief both enterprise and literary skill. Mr. W. O. Bartlett has the credit of infusing life into the business management of the paper, and of putting it into the hands of the newsboys. During the latter years of his life Bryant was almost wholly relieved of editorial labor by a talented corps of assistants.

Bryant looked to journalism for his bread, and pursued it for the greater part of his life as diligently as he would have followed any other vocation. His poetry was never a considerable source of pecuniary profit to him, and he held his gift of song too sacred to mortgage his inspirations. His associate, Mr. Bigelow, informs us that he never engaged in any other business than journalism, never embarked in any financial speculations, and was never an officer of any other financial or industrial corporation than "The Evening Post." Speaking of his industry, he adds, "He was as loyal to his profession as it was to him. I think it quite safe to say that for five days out of every week, during at least forty-two of his fifty-two years of editorial service, Mr. Bryant was at his editorial desk before eight o'clock in the morning,

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and left the daily impress of his character and genius in some form upon the columns of his journal."[1] Nor was he ever satisfied with the apparent performance of his duty. He measured his contributions to the paper rather by quality than quantity. When asked how he had managed to preserve his style in such purity under the deteriorating influences of his exacting profession, he replied, "If my style has fewer defects than you expect, it is for the reason, I suppose, which Dr. Johnson gave Boswell for conversing so well: I always write my best." When reminded of the daily emergencies when there is no time to choose words, and the only alternative to a hasty article is none at all, he answered, "I would sooner the paper would go to press without an editorial article than send to the printer one I was not satisfied with."

His relations with the members of his editorial staff are best presented in the language of an associate: —

"He was reserved always by nature; but his reserve was rather that of shy modesty than that of conscious worth: and, in his intercourse with his associates in the office of 'The Evening Post,' he was always singularly frank and easy. He even avoided that appearance of superior authority which is almost inseparable from the exercise of control over the working of a newspaper staff. His few and infrequent commands were requests always: and not only so;

[1] Address before the Century Club.

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they were requests framed in the language and uttered in the tone of one who asks a favor, not of one who merely wishes to disguise a command.

"Notwithstanding his age and his chiefship in the office, he never, to my knowledge, sent for any member of his staff to come to him: if he had aught to say, he went to the person to whom he wished to say it. He would pass through the editorial rooms with a cheery 'Good-morning;' he would sit down by one's desk and talk, if there was aught to talk about; or, if asked a question while passing, would stand while answering it, and frequently would relate some anecdote suggested by the question, or offer some apt quotation to illustrate the subject under discussion."[1]

The same writer says that he was requested by the editor-in-chief to "deal very gently with the poets, especially the weaker ones." On one occasion the reviewer fell upon a sad case of "poetic idiocy," and expressed his embarrassment to Bryant, saying that the book was so poor that there was nothing in it "to praise, or even lightly to condemn." — "No," he replied; "you can't praise it, of course; it won't do to lie about it: but" — turning the volume over in his hand, and inspecting it — "you might say that the binding is securely put on, and that — well, the binder has planed the edges pretty smooth."

In all details he was a strict economist, and made economy the rule of the establishment by his example rather than by precepts. Nearly all his editorials were written upon the backs of old

[1] The Memorial Pamphlet, p. 67.

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letters, which a less conscientious man would have been ashamed to use. His time was carefully economized; and, though he had his hours of relaxation and literary diversion, no fragment of time was wasted. Even his amusements were parts of a comprehensive system.

Absolute truthfulness was a law of his life. Whatever he said he believed to be true, and even "his silence was truthful." He never flattered, and seldom praised. His virtue led him almost to rudeness, in the judgment of many; and he has been charged with being more frigid than gentility permits. His friends, however, found him cordial, and attribute his apparent insensibility to an unwillingness to express an interest which he did not feel.

As we look back over the half-century of Bryant's life as an editor, we learn two important lessons. The first is, that the highest literary character can be maintained by one who is daily engaged in the practical discussions of his time: the second is, that personal nobility of mind, and integrity of life, may be preserved in the midst of political controversy. To have taught these lessons alone is a sufficient result for a lifetime of toil and sacrifice. Whoever henceforth doubts that a man may be at once a serene scholar, a pure moralist, a faithful citizen, and an active politician, may be directed with republican pride to the career of William Cullen Bryant.

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CHAPTER XII.

THE POET.

PRIOR to the publication of "Thanatopsis," no poem that any one but a literary antiquary now cares to read had been written in this country. The student of American poetry finds in the text-books and encyclopædias of literature a long list of poets belonging to the "Colonial" and "Revolutionary" periods; but he is generally satisfied with a few illustrative extracts from their works. The more inquisitive and patriotic scholar may venture to wipe the dust from the time-worn covers, and peep into the contents of the original volumes. If he succeeds in finding a copy of Francis Hopkinson's "Battle of the Kegs," or "The New Roof," he will have a taste of amusement that our ancestors greatly enjoyed; but he will not be tempted to dwell long over his prize. If he can read enough of Philip Freneau's versified politics to feel safe in pronouncing an opinion on his merits as a poet, he will be surprised to

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learn that Sir Walter Scott and Thomas Campbell thought some of his lines good enough to imitate. If he enjoys political satire, he may find in John Trumbull's "M'Fingal" some passages that will remind him of "Hudibras," but will miss the wealth of learning that sets off the wit of Butler. If he can endure the unrelieved monotony of Timothy Dwight's "Conquest of Canaan" long enough to apply the principles of epic composition, he will discover that more than combined learning and piety are required to make a Milton. If Joel Barlow's "Hasty Pudding" awakens a desire to see his "Columbiad," that effort after a national epic will be found more praiseworthy in the intent than in the execution, hardly winning for its author the immortality that he craved as the American Homer. By this time, curiosity and patriotism are likely to be satisfied; and the independent seeker after forgotten genius is willing to believe, with his countrymen who have reached a conclusion before him, that American poetry — in the nobler modern sense of the word "poetry" — begins with William Cullen Bryant.

Before 1817 it seemed to be the highest ambition of our native writers to produce a faithful copy of existing models. All eyes were fixed upon the masterpieces of a distant land, while the most romantic occurrences and the most charming aspects of nature were without an interpreter.

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The history of literature furnishes no instance of a more sudden transition from an imitative to a creative epoch than occurred at this time. Two years after the publication of "Thanatopsis," Drake's "Culprit Fay" was printed. Halleck, Dana, Sprague, Percival, and others, soon after added their names to the list of poets, and won for their country a place among the nations as a land of song.

Ben Jonson disputed the second statement of the ancient proverb, *Poeta nascitur, non fit*, and contended that a poet is made as well as born. The reader who compares Bryant's juvenile verses with his maturer productions will be likely to admit that the old dramatist was not wholly wrong in qualifying the proverb. The facts of Bryant's life show that his poetical skill was acquired, in part at least, by a careful study of the best poetry. We have seen how he was guided by his father to the favorite authors of his youth. "The Bryant Homestead Book" informs us of his early acquaintance with the poems of Kirke White and Southey. A critical article in "The North-American Review," written by him at the age of twenty-five, proves his familiarity with Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Cowley, Dryden, Waller, Young, Cowper, and Thomson. He had even studied, with some attention, many of the more obscure writers of English verse, such

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as Glover, Cumberland, Dyer, Denham, Darwin, and some of the minor dramatists. He was familiar also with the attempts at poetry in his own land, and reviewed, with evident command of his subject, and minute acquaintance with their works, the leading American versifiers who had preceded him. These studies were not mere diversions, but earnest efforts to grasp the principles of poetical composition. His article on "Trisyllabic Feet in Iambic Verse"[1] shows how closely and patiently he attended to the technics of versification. This early interest in the writings of others was sustained to the end of his life; and at the age of seventy-six he wrote a brief history of English poetry, from which it appears that little of merit in the whole range of English verse escaped his critical attention. In the sketch referred to he avows his belief that all true poets in a literary age are indebted to others. "In our day," he says, "the style of writing adopted by eminent living poets is often seen reflected in the verses of their younger contemporaries, sometimes with an effect like that of a face beheld in a tarnished mirror. Thus it is that poets are formed by their influence upon one another: the greatest of them are more or less indebted for what they are to their predecessors and their contemporaries."[2] Bryant himself was no exception

[1] North-American Review, September, 1819, p. 426.
[2] Introduction to The Library of Poetry and Song.

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to his own rule. The chief differences between him and the versifiers who preceded him are, that he was a poet by birth as well as by training, and that he was better trained.

A moment's reflection suggests the inquiry, Could such a profound student of poetry as Bryant have been without a theory of the poetic art? If he had a theory, and it is discoverable by us, what better key to his works could we have, or what better standard by which to judge him? Although he has nowhere stated such a theory in a full and exhaustive manner, we may gather many of his doctrines from his expressed views on the nature, aim, and method of poetry. It may be more perspicuous to group these scattered doctrines in a systematic form.

1. The proper office of poetry is to fill the mind with delightful images, and awaken the gentler emotions.[1] This doctrine excludes from the realm of the poetical all that is coarse, grotesque, or disgusting, as not furnishing "delightful images." It forbids the excitation of sensual passions, and the violent agitation of the soul by terrific scenes and events, as not included in the awakening of the "gentler emotions." It strikes at the root of the favorite modern notion, that art is merely representative, and may portray any scene, or describe any object, without reference to its char-

[1] Introduction to The Library of Poetry and Song, p. xxiv.

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acter. And yet Bryant was not narrow in his judgment of others. "The varieties of poetic excellence," he says, "are as great as the varieties of beauty in flowers or in the female face. . . . As well, in looking through an astronomer's telescope at that beautiful phenomenon, a double star, in which the twin-flames are one of a roseate and the other of a golden tint, might we quarrel with either of them because it is not colored like its fellow."[1] He loves his own ideal; but he does not deride other men's ideals as scarecrows.

2. Only poems of moderate length, or portions of greater poems, produce the poetical effect.[2] In this he agrees with Poe, who held that a long poem is impossible. As the end of poetry is to awaken the emotions, and as these are necessarily of short duration, an attempt to sustain them beyond a moderate limit must be unsuccessful. Besides, the production of the gentler emotions "is not accomplished on a first and rapid perusal, but requires that the words should be dwelt upon until they become in a certain sense our own, and are adopted as the utterance of our own minds."[3] "Nor, although it be true that the poems which are most famous and most highly prized are works of considerable length, can it be said that the pleasure they give is in any degree proportionate

[1] Introduction to The Library of Poetry and Song, p. xxv.
[2] Id., p. xxiv. [3] Id., p. xxiv.

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to the extent of their plan."[1] Speaking of "The Fairie Queene," he says, "In it we have an invention ever awake, active, and apparently inexhaustible; an affluence of imagery grand, beautiful, or magnificent, as the subject may require; wise observations on human life steeped in poetic coloring, and not without touches of pathos; a wonderful mastery of versification, and the aptest forms of expression. We read at first with admiration: yet to this ere long succeeds a sense of satiety; and we lay down the book, not unwilling, however, after an interval, to take it up with renewed admiration."[2] The doctrine is enforced by the fact that the longer poems in our language, even the best, are seldom read through, and live in the thoughts of men more by their noble passages than as totalities.

3. Poetry should be free from "far-fetched conceits, ideas oddly brought together, and quaint turns of thought."[3] Bryant recognized the psychological fact, that the processes of thought and the flow of feeling are antagonistic. The effort of the intellect to catch the articulations of reason demands the hush of passion. Hence niceties of intellectual refinement tend to check the spontaneous flow of the feelings, and so frustrate the ends of poetry. He finds fault with the artificial

[1] Introduction to The Library of Poetry and Song, p. xxiv.
[2] Id., p. xxvii. [3] Id., p. xxiv.

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school of Pope, as "a school in which the wit predominated over the poetry, — a school marked by striking oppositions of thought, frequent happinesses of expression, and a carefully-balanced modulation, — numbers pleasing at first, but in the end fatiguing."[1] He has little admiration for the so-called metaphysical poets, — "a class of wits whose whole aim was to extort admiration by ingenious conceits, thoughts of such unexpectedness and singularity, that one wondered how they could ever come into the mind of the author. For what they regarded as poetic effect, they depended, not upon the sense of beauty or grandeur, not upon depth or earnestness of feeling, but simply upon surprise at quaint and strange resemblances, contrasts, and combinations of ideas."[2] In pursuing this perverted notion of poetry in some of its modern forms, he states a fact that must not be overlooked by those who compare him with contemporary poets, and miss in his writings some qualities which are popular among certain classes of readers. "There are two tendencies," he says, "by which the seekers after poetic fame in our day are apt to be misled, through both the example of others and the applause of critics. One of these is the desire to extort admiration by striking novelties of expres-

[1] Introduction to The Library of Poetry and Song, p. xxiv.
[2] Id., p. xxvii.

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sion; and the other, the ambition to distinguish themselves by subtilties of thought remote from the common apprehension."[1] Such writing seemed to him to be versified philosophy, or versified nonsense; but poetry it was not.

4. Poetry demands a "fearless simplicity" of style.[2] He regarded Wordsworth as almost the first English poet "who did not seem in some degree to labor under the apprehension of becoming too simple and natural to imagine that a certain pomp of words is necessary to elevate the style, and make that grand and noble, which, in its direct expression, would be homely and trivial."[3] He hails with delight the signs of the disappearance of "hackneyed phrases," used for the rounding-out of a line; the "stiff Latinisms, and all the awkward distortions resorted to by those who thought, that, by putting a sentence out of its proper shape, they were writing like Milton."

5. The materials of poetry are found in the permanent surroundings of life.[4] Transient interests find expression in verse, and sometimes win popular attention for the moment; but they are soon forgotten. Tastes fluctuate, and the fashions of one age are laid aside in the next. Yet there is something permanent. "The elements of poetry

[1] Introduction to The Library of Poetry and Song, p. xxix.
[2] Id., p. xxviii. [3] Id., p. xxviii. [4] Id., p. xxx.

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lie in natural objects, in the vicissitudes of life, in the emotions of the human heart, and the relations of man and man. He who can present them in combinations and lights which at once affect the mind with a deep sense of their truth and beauty is the poet for his own age and the ages that succeed it. It is no disparagement to either his skill or his power that he finds them near at hand: the nearer they lie to the common track of the human intelligence, the more certain is he of the sympathy of his own generation, and of those which shall come after him." [1]

6. Poetry is not free from the laws of ethics. At this point he differed from those who maintain that art exists for its own sake, and is absolute in its freedom. He believed that all things come within the sweep of moral restrictions. When a pretended son of Lord Byron visited New York with verses which he claimed were written by his father, Bryant said to a friend who had mentioned the verses, "We have poems enough of Byron already." With Byron's misanthropy, gloom, scoffing, and libertinism, he had no sympathy. His opinion of such poetry as that of Swinburne and Rossetti has been given in another place. In his noble lines on "The Poet" he has praised "burning words in fluent strains;" but they are "words inspired by wonder and delight," not those

[1] Introduction to The Library of Poetry and Song, p. xxx.

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of cynicism, lust, or discontent. He would have the poet "bind the fleet emotion fast:" —

> "Yet let no empty gust
> Of passion find utterance in thy lay, —
> A blast that whirls the dust
> Along the howling street, and dies away;
> But feelings of calm power and mighty sweep,
> Like currents journeying through the windless deep."

Such were the canons of Bryant's art. Are they the true principles of poetry? Some will answer, "No: they are but half-truths. Tried by them, almost every poet would pass from the tribunal stripped of his bays." No one knew this better than Bryant himself. "Let us beware," he says, "of assigning too narrow limits to the causes which produce the poetic exaltation of mind." He would not deny that gross images may be pleasing to some, that the stronger emotions may be expressed in verse, that a long composition may be poetical in parts, that far-fetched conceits may attract many readers, that complexity of structure may be required by some tastes, that the materials of poetry may be brought from afar, or that immoral verses may excite the mind; but to *him* all these were defects that should not be found in an ideal poem. If any one prefers these to their opposites, they constitute poetry for such a one; but man as man, he thought, could not prefer them. He made no secret of his desire to live

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in the hearts of future generations. He regarded poetry as a high vocation, and the powers of his art as a sacred trust. He would not barter his verses for gold, nor would he violate his instincts of art for the applause of an hour. The occasions for wit, the objects of satire, the recipients of adulation, he knew would soon pass away, and with them the poet who dazzled or stung or flattered for a moment would quickly be forgotten. Two things he saw to be abiding, — the heart of Man and the beauty of Nature. These he knew would never fail, the one to be improved by the development of its powers of apprehension and enjoyment, the other to be studied and appreciated with the advancement of mankind. Hence he sang little of the transient, but much of the eternal. He retired from the hum of the multitude to catch the faint whispers of Nature to his own heart, as Numa sought communion with the nymph Egeria.

In fulfilment of his own ambition, Bryant has been received as the poet of Nature. Here, and here only, he is unsurpassed, not only by his own countrymen, but by any poet of any time or land. He has often been compared to Wordsworth, and has even been called "the Wordsworth of America." His admiration of Wordsworth was undisguised, and the first reading of that writer's poems was one of the memorable delights of his life. He once told Richard H. Dana, that, "upon opening

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Wordsworth, a thousand springs seemed to gush up at once in his heart, and the face of Nature of a sudden to change into a strange freshness and life."[1] If, however, there are some points of resemblance between the two poets, there are also many differences. They are alike in their fondness for Nature, their unaffected love of truth, and their severe simplicity; but there are not to be found in Bryant the "flimsy philosophy about the effects of scenery upon the mind," the "crazy mystical metaphysics," or the "endless wilderness of dull, flat, prosaic declamations," that Macaulay ascribed to Wordsworth.

There are but two periods in Bryant's life as a poet. The first is that of his childhood, when he drank in the pure airs of his native hills, and plucked the fresh spring flowers in their fragrant dells: the second is that of felt responsibility, when study and toil imposed their exactions upon him. This second period begins with his career as a student in college. In the first period, his verses are, as we have seen, mostly political, the world of politics seeming to him to possess more of interest than his quiet home-life: with the beginning of the second period, Nature, dear to him because communion with her visible forms was delightful in contrast with isolation from her charms, becomes the chief source of his enjoyment.

[1] Preface to The Idle Man.

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In the first period there is nothing that the world cares to possess, or that the poet himself esteemed sufficiently to preserve: the second period embraces the remainder of his life, and is nowhere marked by any radical change in his conceptions of poetry or in his style. The author of "The Ages" and of "The Flood of Years" is evidently the same. The only difference between the earliest and the latest productions of this period of sixty years is, that some of the later poems exhibit a finer finish; but even this is not everywhere perceptible. The type of all these productions is in essence the same. Within these sixty years new stars flashed forth in the firmament of poetry, a few to shine on with undiminished brilliancy, many to be quickly lost in darkness; but, like the pole-star, the genius of Bryant has shone on unchanged, sometimes not much noticed, but always visible.

Bryant saw little in man or in society that he deemed worthy of his verse. Love has scarcely at all employed his pen. Human character seems not to have been a favorite study with him. The follies of men were not sufficiently elevated themes for his poetical treatment. The great wrongs of society are seldom either lamented or arraigned in his poems. Even slavery, which has so often inspired Whittier and Longfellow, only once furnished him with a subject, and then not until it

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was a thing of the past. This would be remarkable if it were not for the fact that Bryant was a journalist as well as a poet. Almost every day for the greater part of his life he was called upon, as a professional critic of public men, measures, and institutions, to express his feelings, and pronounce his judgments. At the editorial desk he faced a world in which man is the most conspicuous object. Here he was compelled to study him in all his Protean forms, and to observe, record, approve, or censure his actions. It is not strange, therefore, that he shrank from the contemplation of human life when he sat alone in his quiet library. Here he retired from the bustling whirl of society to meditate upon the calm, sweet scenes of Nature, and to interrogate his own heart. Had his daily life been different, had he touched the busy world at fewer points of contact, he might have found delight in employing his leisure hours in the analysis of man and the portraiture of character.

Most of Bryant's themes are drawn in some way from Nature. Out of a hundred and seventy-one original poems, more than a hundred treat of some natural object, scene, or phenomenon; and in nearly all the others the charms of Nature constitute the setting. A glance at the titles of his poems shows his preference for themes suggested by Nature, — the flowers, as "The Yellow Violet,"

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and "The Fringed Gentian;" the winds, as "The West Wind," "Summer Wind," and "The Evening Wind;" the months of the year, as "March," "June," "October," and "November;" the forces of Nature, as "After a Tempest," "The Hurricane," and "The Tides;" common incidents in the natural world, as "The Return of the Birds," and "The Planting of the Apple-Tree;" aspects of Nature, as "The Cloud," "The Firmament," and "The Prairies;" studies of common things, as "The Snow-Shower," and "Among the Trees;" the mutations of time, as "The Past," and "The Return of Youth;" fancies founded on natural phenomena, as "A Rain-Dream," and "The Flood of Years."

There are many methods of dealing with Nature in poetry. Those adopted by Bryant are as numerous, as various, and as profound, as those employed by any other poet. In order to appreciate the resources of his art, some of his favorite methods may be described and illustrated.

1. The simplest mode of dealing with Nature, and one in which Bryant specially delights, is to recall to the imagination, by vivid description, natural scenes, and the pleasures which they afford. There is a kind of enjoyment in the mere presence of the sights and sounds of Nature. The child pines for them in his confinement, and is full of glee, without knowing why, when turned loose in

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the fields or woods. The pure, bracing air, the clear sky, the rich sunlight, the many-hued flowers, the green leaves, the sparkling streams, the odors of the woods, the varied landscapes, — all invigorate the mind, and restore its freshness and vivacity. There is something healing in green pastures and the songs of birds. This medicinal power of open-air life is especially welcome to those who seldom enjoy it. Bryant's verse has about it this out-of-doors quality. What a transcript of Nature is this passage in "A Summer Ramble"! —

"The quiet August noon has come;
A slumberous silence fills the sky;
The fields are still; the woods are dumb;
In glassy sleep the waters lie.

And mark yon soft white clouds that rest
Above our vale, a moveless throng:
The cattle on the mountain's breast
Enjoy the grateful shadow long.

Oh, how unlike those merry hours
In early June, when earth laughs out,
When the fresh winds make love to flowers,
And woodlands sing, and waters shout!"

In the poem from which the stanzas just quoted are taken, the scene gives rise to reflections which round the poem to its close; but sometimes no higher effect is aimed at than to bring the mind face to face with the charms of Nature for the

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delight of mere contemplation. "Summer Wind" belongs to this class of poems; and so perfect is it of its kind, that it is here quoted without omission: —

"It is a sultry day: the sun has drunk
The dew that lay upon the morning grass:
There is no rustling in the lofty elm
That canopies my dwelling, and its shade
Scarce cools me. All is silent, save the faint
And interrupted murmur of the bee,
Settling on the sick flowers, and then again
Instantly on the wing. The plants around
Feel the too-potent fervors: the tall maize
Rolls up its long green leaves; the clover droops
Its tender foliage, and declines its blooms.
But far in the fierce sunshine tower the hills,
With all their growth of woods, silent and stern,
As if the scorching heat and dazzling light
Were but an element they loved. Bright clouds,
Motionless pillars of the brazen heaven, —
Their bases on the mountains, their white tops
Shining in the far ether, — fire the air
With a reflected radiance, and make turn
The gazer's eye away. For me, I lie
Languidly in the shade, where the thick turf,
Yet virgin from the kisses of the sun,
Retains some freshness; and I woo the wind,
That still delays his coming. Why so slow,
Gentle and voluble spirit of the air?
Oh, come and breathe upon the fainting earth
Coolness and life! Is it that in his caves
He hears me? See! on yonder woody ridge
The pine is bending his proud top; and now,

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Among the nearer groves, chestnut and oak
Are tossing their green boughs about. He comes!
Lo where the grassy meadow runs in waves!
The deep distressful silence of the scene
Breaks up with mingling of unnumbered sounds,
And universal motion. He is come,
Shaking a shower of blossoms from the shrubs,
And bearing on their fragrance; and he brings
Music of birds, and rustling of young boughs,
And sound of swaying branches, and the voice
Of distant waterfalls. All the green herbs
Are stirring in his breath; a thousand flowers,
By the road-side and the borders of the brook,
Nod gayly to each other; glossy leaves
Are twinkling in the sun, as if the dew
Were on them yet; and silver waters break
Into small waves, and sparkle as he comes."

Some of these pictures of natural scenes are faultless in their accuracy of detail, and vividness of effect. At any season the description of autumn in "The Death of the Flowers" produces a mental illusion that transports us from real surroundings to those of the dying year. The solemn iambic measure, the representative objects introduced, and the graphic descriptive epithets, combine to create in the mind an autumnal gloom.

"The melancholy days are come, the saddest of the year,
Of wailing winds, and naked woods, and meadows brown and sear.
Heaped in the hollows of the grove, the autumn leaves lie dead:
They rustle to the eddying gust, and to the rabbit's tread.

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The robin and the wren are flown, and from the shrubs the jay,
And from the wood-top calls the crow through all the gloomy day."

With equal felicity of metre and phrase, and with an added onomatopoetic effect that is almost magical, he fills the mind with the breezy cheeriness of spring-time: —

"There's a dance of leaves in that aspen bower,
There's a titter of winds in that beechen tree,
There's a smile on the fruit and a smile on the flower,
And a laugh from the brook that runs to the sea."

It is noticeable in all of Bryant's poems, that he never shows disgust with any thing in Nature. He is pre-eminently a "healthy poet." There is everywhere the evidence of a strong vitality, and a vigorous re-action of mind in response to the salutations of the external world. He does not present the figure of a man shivering with the cold airs of winter, or perspiring under the heats of summer. He is at once as sensitive as a girl, and as robust as a mountaineer. He enjoys equally the summer sunshine of the South, and the storm-bearing blasts of the North. There is no sentimental shrinking from contact with realities, no whining about discomfort, no condemnation of the established order of things.

2. A second method of presenting the beauties of Nature is to engage the mind with unobserved

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resemblances and inwoven fancies. There is a peculiar satisfaction in discovering hidden charms and correspondences in natural objects. The material world is full of these, though they are not apparent to every eye. The poet aids us in discerning them with the vision of an expert. As the geologist finds fossils where the unscientific rambler beholds only uncouth rocks, so the poet, with an eye trained to the quick perception of beauty, is ever surprising us with marvellous revelations. Bryant possesses this gift in a rare degree. His sight is not only keen and penetrating, but he causes us to share his pleasure by the ready indication of its sources. An hour with him amid the scenes of Nature is like an hour in a rich art-gallery with an intelligent and enthusiastic artist. There is in him nothing of the frittering volubility and perfunctory minuteness of the professional cicerone. He points out the beauties of Nature because he loves them, and wants others to love them too. Note the fine tracing of resemblances in the following passage from "A Winter Piece:" —

"Come when the rains
Have glazed the snow and clothed the trees with ice,
While the slant sun of February pours
Into the bowers a flood of light. Approach!
The incrusted surface shall upbear thy steps,
And the broad arching portals of the grove
Welcome thy entering. Look! the massy trunks

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Are cased in the pure crystal: each light spray,
Nodding and tinkling in the breath of heaven,
Is studded with its trembling water-drops,
That glimmer with an amethystine light:
But round the parent-stem the long low boughs
Bend in a glittering ring; the arbors hide
The glassy floor. Oh! you might deem the spot
The spacious cavern of some virgin mine
Deep in the womb of earth, — where the gems grow,
And diamonds put forth radiant rods, and bud
With amethyst and topaz, — and the place
Lit up most royally with the pure beam
That dwells in them. Or, haply, the vast hall
Of fairy palace, that outlasts the night,
And fades not in the glory of the sun;
Where crystal columns send forth slender shafts
And crossing arches; and fantastic aisles
Wind from the sight in brightness, and are lost
Among the crowded pillars. Raise thine eye:
Thou seest no cavern-roof, no palace-vault:
There the blue sky and the white drifting cloud
Look in."

Sometimes his fancy quickens inanimate things into life by an implied personification that awakens a kind of sympathy with them, as in these stanzas from "The Snow-Shower:" —

"Here delicate snow-stars, out of the cloud,
Come floating downward in airy play,
Like spangles dropped from the glistening crowd,
That whitened by night the Milky Way;
There broader and burlier masses fall:
The sullen water buries them all;
Flake after flake, —
All drowned in the dark and silent lake.

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And some, as on tender wings they glide
From their chilly birth-cloud dim and gray,
Are joined in their fall, and, side by side,
Come clinging along their unsteady way,
As friend with friend, or husband with wife,
Makes hand in hand the passage of life:
Each mated flake
Soon sinks in the dark and silent lake.

Lo! while we are gazing, in swifter haste
Stream down the snows till the air is white:
As myriads by myriads madly chased,
They fling themselves from their shadowy height.
The fair, frail creatures of middle sky,
What speed they make, with their grave so nigh, —
Flake after flake,
To lie in the dark and silent lake!"

This mode of treatment occasionally blends the real and the fanciful in such ingenious yet natural ways as to produce the emotion of pathos. In "The Wind and the Stream," for example, the personification is so perfect, that we almost feel compassion for the cheated little stream, as we would for an innocent and simple maiden. The poem cannot be appreciated except as a whole, and so is given entire: —

"A brook came stealing from the ground:
You scarcely saw its silvery gleam,
Among the herbs that hung around
The borders of the winding stream, —
The pretty stream, the placid stream,
The softly-gliding, bashful stream.

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A breeze came wandering from the sky,
  Light as the whispers of a dream:
He put the o'erhanging grasses by,
  And softly stooped to kiss the stream, —
The pretty stream, the flattered stream,
The shy yet unreluctant stream.

The water, as the wind passed o'er,
  Shot upward many a glancing beam,
Dimpled and quivered more and more,
  And tripped along, a livelier stream, —
The flattered stream, the simpering stream,
The fond, delighted, silly stream.

Away the airy wanderer flew
  To where the fields with blossoms teem,
To sparkling springs, and rivers blue,
  And left alone that little stream, —
The flattered stream, the cheated stream,
The sad, forsaken, lonely stream.

That careless wind came never back;
  He wanders yet the fields, I deem:
But on its melancholy track
  Complaining went that little stream, —
The cheated stream, the hopeless stream,
The ever-murmuring, mourning stream."

3. A third method is to make the scenes of Nature the theatre of action. This is a favorite method with Bryant; and there is scarcely a poem, where the other methods are not employed, in which this is not illustrated. Hence the reading of his verse gives us a pleasure akin to that of the

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ancient Athenians, when they assembled in their grand open-air theatre, with the distant mountains and the open sea for scenery, and the moving clouds for a canopy. Hence the expansive effect of Bryant's poetry upon the mind of the reader. His figures never stand alone: an illimitable landscape lies behind them, — an open outlook of sea or sky, that may, indeed, render his characters less conspicuous, but that leads the mind to something greater than any character, and imparts to the whole a peculiar impressiveness. If he sings of the men of "Seventy-Six," he first outlines with a bold hand the hills that bred them, as if to indicate the natural causes of their valor: —

"What heroes from the woodland sprung,
When through the fresh-awakened land
The thrilling cry of freedom rung,
And to the work of warfare strung
The yeoman's iron hand!

Hills flung the cry to hills around,
And ocean-mart replied to mart,
And streams, whose springs were yet unfound,
Pealed far away the startling sound
Into the forest's heart.

Then marched the brave from rocky steep,
From mountain-river swift and cold:
The borders of the stormy deep,
The vales where gathered waters sleep,
Sent up the strong and bold,

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As if the very earth again
Grew quick from God's creating breath;
And from the sods of grove and glen
Rose ranks of lion-hearted men
To battle to the death."

If he tells a story, he chooses Nature for his background, and the best part of the whole is descriptive. Plot is of little account with him: scenery is every thing. Take, for example, "An Indian Story." An Indian's bride is stolen while he is hunting. He goes in pursuit of the ravisher, kills him, and brings back the maiden. The capture and the killing are not narrated, but are suggested; while the changing aspects of Nature are noted with minute care: —

"'Twas early summer when Maquon's bride
Was stolen away from his door;
But at length the maples in crimson are dyed,
And the grape is black on the cabin-side,
And she smiles at his hearth once more.

But far in the pine-grove dark and cold,
Where the yellow leaf falls not,
Nor the autumn shines in scarlet and gold,
There lies a hillock of fresh dark mould
In the deepest gloom of the spot."

Most poets, if called upon to write on "The Antiquity of Freedom," would hardly introduce a natural image, and would be almost certain not to paint a natural scene. Observe how Bryant approaches his theme: —

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"Here are old trees, tall oaks, and gnarlèd pines,
That stream with gray-green mosses: here the ground
Was never trenched by spade, and flowers spring up
Unsown, and die ungathered. It is sweet
To linger here among the flitting birds,
And leaping squirrels, wandering brooks, and winds
That shake the leaves, and scatter, as they pass,
A fragrance from the cedars, thickly set
With pale-blue berries. In these peaceful shades,
Peaceful, unpruned, immeasurably old,
My thoughts go up the long dim path of years,
Back to the earliest days of liberty."

Then rises the apparition of Freedom before his mind. The scene shapes the writer's conception of him, — a conception as the scene requires, far different from the traditional Goddess of Liberty; and he addresses him in this apostrophe, a passage unsurpassed in grandeur by any twenty lines of English verse: —

"O Freedom! thou art not, as poets dream,
A fair young girl, with light and delicate limbs,
And wavy tresses gushing from the cap
With which the Roman master crowned his slave
When he took off the gyves. A bearded man,
Armed to the teeth, art thou: one mailèd hand
Grasps the broad shield, and one the sword; thy brow,
Glorious in beauty though it be, is scarred
With tokens of old wars; thy massive limbs
Are strong with struggling. Power at thee has launched
His bolts, and with his lightnings smitten thee:
They could not quench the life thou hast from heaven.
Merciless Power has dug thy dungeon deep;

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And his swart armorers, by a thousand fires,
Have forged thy chain. Yet, while he deems thee bound,
The links are shivered, and the prison-walls
Fall outward: terribly thou springest forth,
As springs the flame above a burning pile,
And shoutest to the nations, who return
Thy shouting, while the pale oppressor flies."

Nor does the sublime presence which the poet's imagination has placed in this rural scene divert his mind from the natural surroundings in which the great conception seems to have had its birth. Freedom, whose enemy never sleeps, must not close his lids in slumber; but he continues in his address: —

"Wouldst thou rest
Awhile from tumult and the frauds of men,
These old and friendly solitudes invite
Thy visit. They, while yet the forest-trees
Were young upon the unviolated earth,
And yet the moss-stains on the rock were new,
Beheld thy glorious childhood, and rejoiced."

4. A fourth treatment of Nature is to point out her ministration to the wants and pleasures of man. The benefactions of Nature seem to invest her with a higher attribute than any quality of material loveliness, — a moral virtue that wins our admiration, and claims our affection. The ancients conceived of the Earth as a great mother nourishing her offspring with maternal tenderness, and worshipped her with special honors as Deme-

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ter or Ceres. The myth still lingers in the metaphor "Mother Earth;" and the worship, rationalized and purified by a better faith, still breathes in the best poetry of modern times. Whatever may be their theories of Nature, all men confess that she is kind and generous. Her beneficence rises above mere utilitarian ends, and scatters the pathway of life with delight for every sense. Bryant is fond of acknowledging these ministries of Nature. They are accompanied by various gradations of feeling. Sometimes there is a pensive sadness at the withdrawal of Nature's smile, as in these stanzas of "Autumn Woods:"—

"O Autumn! why so soon
Depart the hues that make thy forests glad,
Thy gentle wind, and thy fair sunny noon,
And leave thee wild and sad?

Ah! 'twere a lot too blest
Forever in thy colored shades to stray;
Amid the kisses of the soft south-west
To roam and dream for aye;

And leave the vain low strife
That makes men mad, the tug for wealth and power,
The passions and the cares that wither life,
And waste its little hour."

Sometimes there is merely a passing recognition of the pleasures afforded by natural objects, with a delicate implication that they exist for the refreshment of man, as in the lines on "May Evening:"—

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"The breath of spring-time at this twilight hour
Comes through the gathering glooms,
And bears the stolen sweets of many a flower
Into my silent rooms.

Where hast thou wandered, gentle gale, to find
The perfumes thou dost bring?
By brooks that through the wakening meadows wind,
Or brink of rushy spring?"

Sometimes there is a reference to Nature as the source of joyous emotions and lofty inspirations, as in the following stanzas: —

"And deep were my musings in life's early blossom,
'Mid the twilight of mountain-groves wandering long:
How thrilled my young veins, and how throbbed my full bosom,
When o'er me descended the spirit of song!

'Mong the deep-cloven fells that for ages had listened
To the rush of the pebble-paved river between,
Where the kingfisher screamed, and gray precipice glistened,
All breathless with awe have I gazed on the scene,

Till I felt the dark power o'er my reveries stealing
From the gloom of the thicket that over me hung,
And the thoughts that awoke in that rapture of feeling
Were formed into verse as they rose to my tongue."

5. A fifth mode of treating Nature, and the last we shall notice, is to interpret the hidden meaning of material symbolism. To Bryant, external Nature seemed

"An emanation of the indwelling Life,
A visible token of the upholding Love,
That are the soul of this great universe."

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Behind all phenomena he saw the spiritual forces that shaped them, and beneath every form of loveliness he perceived the sustaining framework of a moral purpose. He loved the natural world; but he worshipped its Author. Nature seemed to him not only a benefactor, but a teacher; and not a teacher of philosophy merely, but also of divinity.

He has been charged with pantheistic materialism; and, if we confine ourselves to "Thanatopsis," the charge seems to be well founded. In this poem there is no mention of Deity, but a cold insensate Nature confronts us everywhere: the soul is not so much as named, but in death each human trace is surrendered up. A resurrection is impossible; for man goes to mix "forever" with the elements. There is no solace offered for a dying hour, beyond the magnificence of the couch, the good company of ancient skeletons, and the assurance that all shall come to the same resting-place. There is no preparation commended, except to live in such a manner as finally to lie down with composure in the "last sleep." This is truly a Pagan poem; and no one can read it, remembering the possibilities of a Christian poem on the same theme, without feeling that it is. There are lacking in it even the best sentiments of Paganism. There is no distinction between the good and the bad. It is without deity, soul, immortality, or conscience. The last paragraph of the poem was added after the

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original draught was published, and is an obvious attempt to modify its sentiment. The conclusion is forced and unnatural, although even this is Pagan. There is no ground given for being "sustained and soothed by an unfaltering trust;" for the poet has taken pains to assure us that there are no "pleasant dreams" in store. We are to be "a brother to the insensible rock, and to the sluggish clod;" we are to "surrender up our individual being;" we are "to mix forever with the elements." Consciousness, individuality, and spiritual existence, beyond the grave, are by implication denied. Where in all this do we find a rational support for "an unfaltering trust"? or what prospect is there of "pleasant dreams"? The stately music and solemn imagery of the majestic blank-verse are like a cathedral service, in which storied windows and organ-tones combine to impress the mind with funereal awe, without uplifting or consoling it.

There can be little doubt, that, when Bryant wrote this poem, he contemplated death, for the moment, from a Pagan point of view. He laid the poem aside: it was discovered by his father, admired, and published. But it did not accord with Bryant's real views on the subject. This is evident from the added paragraph, in which he strove to divest the poem of some of its harshness. The introduction of the word "spirit," in the tenth

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line of the part prefixed to the original poem, does not much relieve the matter; for it is here used, as it often is by materialists, as a synonyme of consciousness. It was impossible for Bryant to express his true views in this poem without marring its consistency; but turn to the lines entitled "Blessed are They that Mourn," and see how Christian faith lifts the veil from the future: —

> "For God hath marked each sorrowing day,
> And numbered every secret tear;
> And heaven's long age of bliss shall pay
> For all his children suffer here."

Read in the verses, "No Man knoweth his Sepulchre," how,

> "Whene'er the good and just
> Close the dim eye on life and pain,
> Heaven watches o'er their sleeping dust
> Till the pure spirit comes again."

See, in the "Hymn to Death," how he finds the stern monarch a liberator of the good, and an executioner of the base; and with what well-founded trust he exclaims in his apostrophe to his departed father, —

> "Rest, therefore, thou
> Whose early guidance trained my infant steps, —
> Rest in the bosom of God till the brief sleep
> Of death is over, and a happier life
> Shall dawn to waken thine insensible dust."

These were the sentiments of his young man-

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hood, and time only rendered them more precious to him. Bryant saw, as every great poet sees, that true poetry cannot grow in the flinty soil of materialism. Spirit, conscience, deity, and immortality are as necessary to its life as air and water to the tender plant. Strike from the poetry of any literature its ethical and supernatural conceptions, and there remains only a mass of rubbish, a chaos which mere intellect cannot transform into a cosmos.

We have said that Bryant viewed the material world as symbolical of the spiritual. The flight of the waterfowl, for example, teaches him a lesson of trustfulness in the divine superintendence of human life:—

> "He who from zone to zone
> Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
> In the long way that I must tread alone
> Will lead my steps aright."

The calm beauty of the earth after the passing of the tempest suggests that tranquillity that time promises to bring to the storm-beaten life of man:—

> "I looked, and thought the quiet of the scene
> An emblem of the peace that yet shall be;
> When o'er earth's continents, and isles between,
> The noise of war shall cease from sea to sea,
> And married nations dwell in harmony;
> When millions, crouching in the dust to one,
> No more shall beg their lives on bended knee,
> Nor the black stake be dressed, nor in the sun
> The o'erlabored captive toil, and wish his life were done."

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The west wind, breathing its sighs through the dark pines of the forest, seems to him a type of human repining; and he exclaims, —

"Ah! thou art like our wayward race:
When not a shade of pain or ill
Dims the bright smile of Nature's face,
Thou lov'st to sigh and murmur still."

In his last poem, "Our Fellow-Worshippers," he hears in Nature a "universal symphony of praise," as if creation existed only to glorify its Author: —

"The blossomed apple-tree,
Among its flowery tufts, on every spray,
Offers the wandering bee
A fragrant chapel for his matin-lay;
And a soft bass is heard
From the quick pinions of the humming-bird.

Haply — for who can tell? —
Aërial beings from the world unseen,
Haunting the sunny dell,
Or slowly floating o'er the flowery green,
May join our worship here
With harmonies too fine for mortal ear."

Though Bryant's peculiar sphere is that of interpreting Nature, he has not always confined himself to the treatment of natural themes. He has occasionally displayed unusual power in other

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kinds of poetical composition. His Indian poems constitute a class by themselves, but vary widely in excellence. "The Indian at the Burial-place of his Fathers" is singularly cold and artificial. It is hardly in keeping with savage ferocity and fire to make the Indian say, as he surveys the land of his fathers in the possession of the hated pale-face, —

> "But I behold a fearful sign,
> To which the white men's eyes are blind:
> Their race may vanish hence, like mine,
> And leave no trace behind,
> Save ruins o'er the region spread,
> And the white stones above the dead."

The wronged red man would not find much consolation in the reflection, —

> "The realm our tribes are crushed to get
> May be a barren desert yet."

"The Indian Girl's Lament" opens finely, but almost at once falls off into meditations too reflective for a simple forest maiden's song; though the concluding stanzas are very beautiful. "A Song of Pitcairn's Island" is perfect in its melody and simplicity, its sweet spontaneous music of the heart. The tragic story of "Monument Mountain" is not surpassed in grace of diction or touching pathos.

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In a few poems Bryant has attempted to write in a humorous vein. There seems to be some difference of opinion among competent critics as to his success. Mr. E. P. Whipple says, "Surely the little poem of 'The Mosquito' indicates a vein of sentiment, delicate, playful, and genial, that might have been developed into many a piece of exquisite poetical wit and gracefully fanciful humor, which would have relieved the sad, sweet, earnest tone of his ordinary meditations." Mr. R. H. Stoddard, speaking of the lines "To a Mosquito," "A Meditation on Rhode-Island Coal," and "Spring in Town," expresses the opinion that "the humor of these elaborate trifles is very thin, and the imagination expended on them utterly wasted." He adds, that "Bryant had a strong sense of humor; but it found no vent in his verse." The poet himself seems to have held his powers as a humorist in low estimation; for in the latter years of his life he wrote nothing of a humorous character, except the sprightly lines "Robert of Lincoln," which Mr. E. C. Stedman justly describes as "full of bird-music and fancy."

Twice in his old age Bryant gave free wing to his imagination, and wrote two charming fairy-poems, — "Sella," and "The Little People of the Snow." Though they are the longest of his poetical compositions, either can be read at one sitting, conformably to his theory that a poem must be

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brief. In both the plot is slender; but the interest is well sustained. It is for the details, rather than for the general conception, that these poems command our admiration. Light and airy as they are, they produce the effect of reality upon the mind at moments during their perusal. Sella's magical slippers transport her to the abysses of the ocean; but her description of what she sees there almost causes us to forget the fairy character of the narrative in the contemplation of the secrets of the deep: —

"And then we wandered off amid the groves
Of coral, loftier than the growths of earth:
The mightiest cedar lifts no trunk like theirs,
So huge, so high toward heaven, nor overhangs
Alleys and bowers so dim. We moved between
Pinnacles of black rock, which, from beneath
Molten by inner fires, — so said my guide, —
Gushed long ago into the hissing brine,
That quenched and hardened them; and now they stand
Motionless in the currents of the sea
That part and flow around them. As we went,
We looked into the hollows of the abyss
To which the never-resting waters sweep
The skeletons of sharks, the long white spines
Of narwhal and of dolphin, bones of men
Shipwrecked, and mighty ribs of foundered barks.
Down the blue pits we looked, and hastened on.

But beautiful the fountains of the sea
Sprang upward from its bed: the silvery jets
Shot branching far into the azure brine;

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And, where they mingled with it, the great deep
Quivered and shook as shakes the glimmering air
Above a furnace. So we wandered through
The mighty world of waters, till at length
I wearied of its wonders, and my heart
Began to yearn for my dear mountain-home.
I prayed my gentle guide to lead me back
To the upper air. 'A glorious realm,' I said,
'Is this thou openest to me; but I stray
Bewildered in its vastness: these strange sights
And this strange light oppress me. I must see
The faces that I love, or I shall die."

In "The Little People of the Snow," Eva, a child of the Caucasus, is enticed by a fairy maiden to wander over the glistening snows to the frost-palace, where the little people are engaged in their festivities. She cannot enter; but, as she looks through the window of pellucid ice, she beholds this scene: —

"And in that hall a joyous multitude
Of these by whom its glistening walls were reared
Whirled in a merry dance to silvery sounds,
That rang from cymbals of transparent ice,
And ice-cups, quivering to the skilful touch
Of little fingers. Round and round they flew,
As when in spring, about a chimney-top,
A cloud of twittering swallows, just returned,
Wheel round and round, and turn and wheel again,
Unwinding their swift track. So rapidly
Flowed the meandering stream of that fair dance
Beneath that dome of light. Bright eyes that looked

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From under lily-brows, and gauzy scarfs
Sparkling like snow-wreaths in the early sun,
Shot by the window in their mazy whirl."

The perfection of the illusion is not felt until we find our interest turned to pathos, as the child, chilled by her exposure, sinks on the snow-drift, and

"The hues of life
Fade from the fair smooth brow and rounded cheek
As fades the crimson from a morning cloud."

Nor does it seem unnatural, that, when the mourning cottagers have dug a little grave for her beneath the snow,

"A thousand slender voices round,
Like echoes softly flung from rock and hill,
Took up the strain, and all the hollow air
Seemed mourning for the dead; for on that day
The Little People of the Snow had come
From mountain-peak and cloud and icy hall
To Eva's burial."

Though he has seldom attempted the expression of mere sentiment, Bryant has left enough specimens to show what he might have done in this department of poetry. "The Land of Dreams" is as beautiful as the fairest image of that mighty realm of shadows. "The Burial of Love" is hardly equalled, certainly not surpassed, by any composition of its kind written by an American.

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"The May Sun sheds an Amber Light" is a touching expression of sorrow for the dead.

It is a little remarkable that the great civil contest in which the poet felt so keen an interest should not have evoked more martial music from his lyre. Though his war-lyrics are few in number, they are among his noblest efforts. "Not Yet," and "Our Country's Call," possess both fire and strength, and are worthy of a place beside the battle-songs of any nation.

Bryant was a close student of the poetical literatures of other languages than the English, and has given evidence of this in a score of translations from the Spanish, Portuguese, Provençal, French, and German. So far as they have been compared with the originals, they are certainly equal to them in compactness, force of sentiment, and beauty of diction. The translations from the Spanish are probably the best, and are fine imitations of the stately movement of that language.

The translation of the Homeric poems, however, most taxed and best displayed his powers as a translator. When he undertook this herculean task, he entered an arena where many had fallen, and none had won undisputed laurels. Some of the most celebrated poets of England, and several of her finest scholars, had failed to produce a translation wholly satisfactory to the critical world. Considering his advanced age when the

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task was attempted, the undertaking seems almost heroic.

Scholars are far from agreement as to what is to be aimed at in a translation of Homer. Some maintain that the English form of the poem must affect us who read it as the Greek affected the Greeks: others contend that this is impossible, and the aim should be to affect the best Homeric scholars of the present as the original poems affect them. Some advocate the closest possible imitation of the ancient forms, — verse, metre, and diction: others with equal zeal prefer a paraphrase of the substance into such English forms as suit the genius of our times and language, and produce a poem that shall seem like an original and native composition. Bryant thus states his own purpose: "I have endeavored to be strictly faithful in my rendering; to add nothing of my own; and to give the reader, so far as our language would allow, all that I found in the original." This, if closely examined, does not appear to be a very definite theory of translation; for it is a question, — indeed, the question at issue among the translators, — in what faithfulness consists. Bryant seems to have meant by it fidelity to the spirit and verbal forms of the original; but he did not include conformity to the versification. He would doubtless have chosen hexameters, had he not regarded them an imperfect metrical form

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in English, and especially unsuited to the rendering of the Greek, on account of the greater compactness of the English equivalents. He found blank verse "best suited to a narrative poem by its flexibility of construction," and adapted "to avoid in a greater degree the appearance of constraint which is too apt to belong to a translation." Without question, he chose what for him was the best form of verse; but it may be doubted whether we can ever have a perfect English Homer until the hexameter verse is so developed and improved in the hands of some master-poet, that we may read Homer in faultless English hexameters. At present this seems impossible, and we must accept the blank verse as the best attained expression of the Homeric spirit.

In his elaborate discussion of the problem of Homeric translation, Matthew Arnold mentions four qualities of Homer which he claims a translator should aim to reproduce. He should remember of Homer, "(1) that he is eminently rapid; (2) that he is eminently plain and direct, both in the evolution of his thought and in the expression of it, — that is, both in his syntax and in his words; (3) that he is eminently plain and direct in the substance of his thought, — that is, in his matter and ideas; and, finally, (4) that he is eminently noble." In judging the chief English translators, he adds. "For want of duly penetrating them-

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selves with the first-named quality of Homer, — his rapidity, — Cowper and Mr. Wright have failed in rendering him; that, for want of duly appreciating the second-named quality, — his plainness and directness of style and diction, — Pope and Mr. Sotheby have failed in rendering him; that, for want of appreciating the third, — his plainness and directness of ideas, — Chapman has failed in rendering him; while, for want of appreciating the fourth, — his nobleness, — Mr. Newman, who has clearly seen some of the faults of his predecessors, has yet failed more conspicuously than any of them." [1]

Bryant seems to have apprehended and endeavored to realize all four of these qualities; and certainly he has succeeded in combining more of them than any previous translator. If he fails anywhere, it is in reproducing the first, — rapidity of movement. Mr. Stedman thinks blank verse "must lack the Homeric rush and swiftness, and must also become prosaic in its substitutes for the recurrent and connecting phrases of the Greek text." He thinks, too, that "the tendency of Bryant's mind, even in its epic mood, was slow and stately, — Latin rather than Greek." It deserves in fairness to be said that any form of English verse is likely to fail of representing the darting quality of the Greek. The observation on the

[1] Essays in Criticism, p. 291.

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Latin character of Bryant's mind is not only just, but important. It is this that has enabled him to sustain the Homeric "nobleness" in a manner that has not been surpassed. He is everywhere plain and direct, both in figures and diction. In this respect he is Homeric even in his own poems.

The severest test of the quality of "nobleness" of which Mr. Arnold speaks is naturally found in the speeches of the deities, and especially in those of the great Earth-shaker, the imperial Zeus himself. Bryant reproduces the simplicity of Homer, trusting to the weight of the ideas rather than to verbal ponderosity to give dignity to these speeches. The following example occurs at the beginning of the eighth book of "The Iliad:" —

"Now Morn in saffron robes had shed her light
O'er all the earth, when Jove the Thunderer
Summoned the gods to council on the heights
Of many-peaked Olympus. He addressed
The assembly, and all listened as he spake: —
'Hear, all ye gods and all ye goddesses!
While I declare the thought within my breast,
Let none of either sex presume to break
The law I give, but cheerfully obey,
That my design may sooner be fulfilled.
Whoever, stealing from the rest, shall seek
To aid the Grecian cause, or that of Troy,
Back to Olympus scourged and in disgrace
Shall he be brought; or I will seize and hurl
The offender down to rayless Tartarus,
Deep, deep in the great gulf below the earth,

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With iron gates and threshold forged of brass,
As far beneath the shades as earth from heaven.
Then shall he learn how greatly I surpass
All other gods in power. Try, if ye will,
Ye gods, that all may know: suspend from heaven
A golden chain; let all the immortal host
Cling to it from below: ye could not draw,
Strive as ye might, the all-disposing Jove
From heaven to earth. And yet, if I should choose
To draw it upward to me, I should lift,
With it and you, the earth itself and sea
Together; and I then would bind the chain
Around the summit of the Olympian mount,
And they should hang aloft, so far my power
Surpasses all the power of gods and men.'"

If there be any lack of "nobleness" here, it is Homer's fault, and belongs to his conception of the king of heaven. But read Pope's rendering of the same passage, and notice how he strives to add dignity to it by the use of sounding epithets: —

"Aurora now, fair daughter of the dawn,
Sprinkled with rosy light the dewy lawn;
When Jove convened the senate of the skies,
Where high Olympus' cloudy tops arise.
The sire of gods his awful silence broke;
The heavens attentive trembled as he spoke: —
'Celestial states, immortal gods! give ear;
Hear our decree, and reverence what ye hear.
The fixed decree, which not all heaven can move, —
Thou, Fate, fulfil it! and, ye powers, approve! —
What god but enters yon forbidden field,
Who yields assistance, or but wills to yield,

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Back to the skies with shame he shall be driven,
Gashed with dishonest wounds, the scorn of heaven;
Or far, oh! far from steep Olympus thrown,
Low in the dark Tartarean gulf shall groan,
With burning chains fixed to the brazen floors,
And locked by hell's inexorable doors,
As deep beneath the infernal centre hurled
As from that centre to the ethereal world.
Let him who tempts me dread those dire abodes,
And know the Almighty is the God of gods.
League all your forces, then, ye powers above,
Join all, and try the omnipotence of Jove.
Let down our golden everlasting chain,
Whose strong embrace holds heaven and earth and main;
Strive all, of mortal and immortal birth,
To drag, by this, the Thunderer down to earth:
Ye strive in vain! If I but stretch this hand,
I heave the gods, the ocean, and the land;
I fix the chain to great Olympus' height,
And the vast world hangs trembling in my sight!
For such I reign, unbounded and above;
And such are men and gods, compared to Jove.'"

There is prettiness in the expressions, "sprinkled with rosy light the dewy lawn," and "the senate of the skies;" but they are not Homeric. Pope's Jupiter talks like Cicero, but not like a god. Bryant is not guilty of the anachronism involved in the use of the word "hell." His "rayless Tartarus" does not describe a place by an epithet derived from its proper name, as Pope does in "the dark Tartarean gulf." Bryant's "deep, deep in the great gulf," is immeasurably superior to Pope's

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puerile "Or far, oh! far," that reminds us of Thomson's "O Sophonisba! Sophonisba O!" at which the wag in the gallery bawled out, "O Jamie Thomson! Jamie Thomson O!" Bryant does not entangle the universe in a golden chain in order to make a rhyme, as Pope does when he says that its "strong embrace holds heaven and earth and main."

As, in taking leave of our poet, we look with a broader sweep of vision over his works, numerous fertile topics suggests themselves. The purity of his vocabulary, limited rigidly to an exceedingly narrow range; his rhythmical accuracy, almost faultless in its conformity to the best standards; his power of thought, far-reaching in its penetration; his fulness of matter, so marked as sometimes even to overburden his expression, — are themes well worthy of detailed examination: but this chapter has been already too much extended. There is one thing, however, that no careful reader of Bryant can overlook, — his profound interest in the destiny of man. "'The still, sad music of humanity,'" says Mr. Stoddard, "was ever sounding in his ears, moaning like the wind of the forest. To his eyes humanity was an endless procession, moving along the earth, in sunshine and shadow, out of the darkness of birth into the night of death. They repose and they suffer, these fleeting, vanishing figures, but not for long. The end is

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certain and near. This philosophy of life is a serious one; but it admits of consolation and cheerfulness. It is dreary in Byron; it is awful in Ecclesiastes: but it is neither in Bryant." He does not close his eyes to the sombre present; but he looks beyond for hope. The "unfaltering trust" that sustained him in his bereaved old age finds its fullest and grandest expression in the crowning poem of his life, "The Flood of Years." He meditates sadly on the sullen stream that bears our lives away; but, beyond the dismal barrier that lies where the life to come touches the life that is, there is a place where wounded hearts are healed forever.

> "In the room
> Of this grief-shadowed present there shall be
> A Present in whose reign no grief shall gnaw
> The heart, and never shall a tender tie
> Be broken; in whose reign the eternal Change,
> That waits on growth and action, shall proceed
> With everlasting Concord hand in hand."

Life is too noisy for such a poet to be heard by the crowd. Bryant never was heard by it. His early fame, based on a youthful achievement, a few selections from his poems in the school-readers, and an unusual length and dignity of life, have kept his name before the people until its very mention inspires a kind of reverence. But, in truth, his works have not had a circulation like those of

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Longfellow and Whittier, — the inmates of almost every American home where literature is prized. Thousands of well-educated persons among his countrymen cannot name a dozen of his poems. This is easily accounted for. He has few poems of sufficient length for publication in separate volumes, thus challenging the public curiosity. He has told no story that the ordinary reader feels that he must know, in order to be abreast of the literary world. He has written little that affords topics of conversation. Men criticise a story, — its plot, its scenes, its characters. The names of its heroes and heroines are passed about from lip to lip, and curiosity is piqued to know who and what they are. Wit affords quotable passages, conceits are nuts to crack, quiddities of diction pass into the verbal circulation, satires provoke discussion; but all these are excluded from Bryant's works by his conception of poetry. As for "the gentler emotions" which he aims to awaken, they are crowded out by the money-clinking, weapon-clashing, and horn-blowing of a busy people. There is nothing in Bryant's poetry that compels attention. It is like the charms of Nature that it noiselessly unveils. The cheering sunshine, the fragrance of flowers, the songs of birds, the whispering of winds, the blue depths of heaven, are all unheeded by the eager merchant, the breathless lawyer, and the plotting politician; but they are balm and in-

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cense and music and conversation to the toil-worn man when he steps forth free from the thraldom of his cares. It is to man in his higher and generic humanity that Bryant speaks. His audience will be small while the cheap Johns are shouting in the streets; but his voice will never fall upon the empty air without an auditor. As a brother bard has sung of "The Dead Master,"—

"Who loves and lives with Nature tolerates
Baseness in nothing: high and solemn thoughts
Are his, — clean deeds, and honorable life.
If he be poet, as our Master was,
His song will be a mighty argument,
Heroic in its structure to support
The weight of the world forever! All great things
Are native to it, as the sun to heaven.
Such was thy song, O Master! and such fame
As only kings of thought receive is thine:
Be happy with it in thy larger life
Where Time is not, and the sad word — Farewell!"

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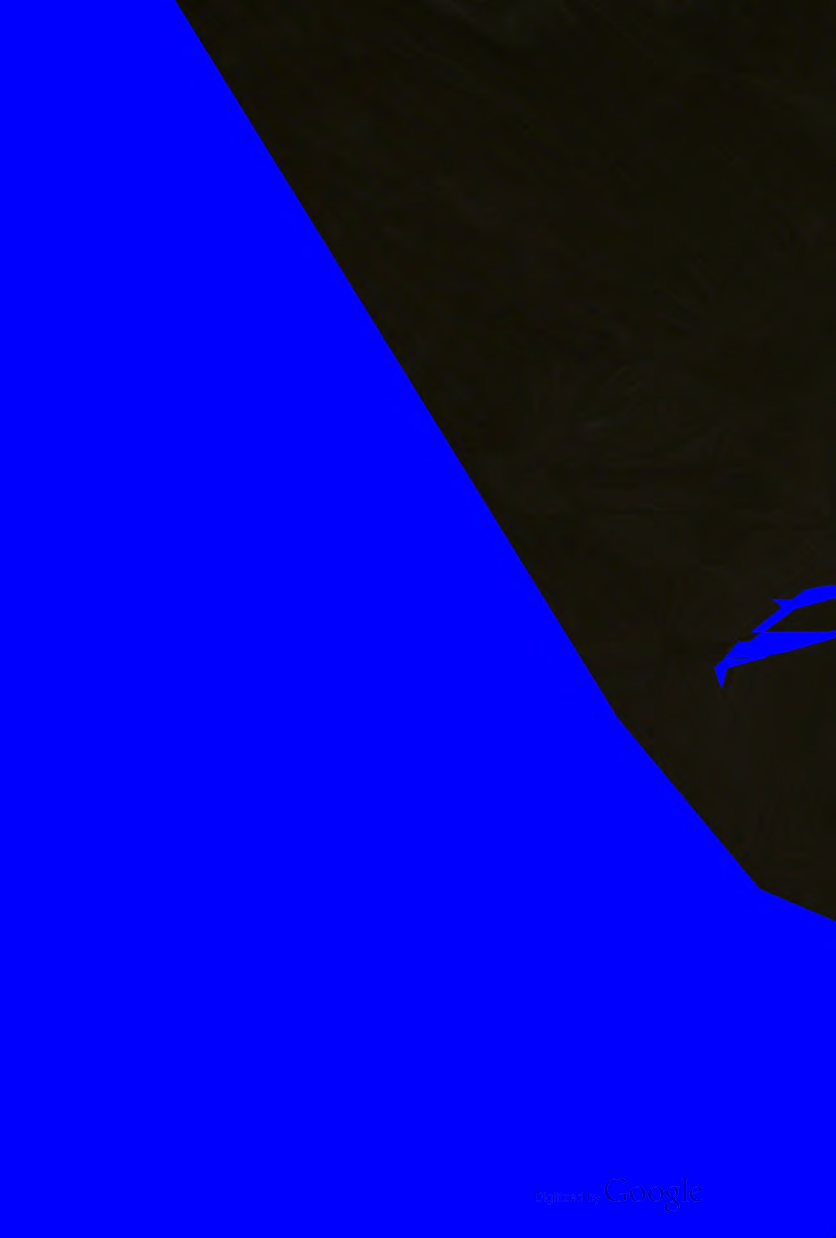

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